

MUTINY

Being a Survey
of Mutinies
From Spartacus
To Invergordon

By

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PREFACE



MUTINIES have happened since armies were first gathered for war and slaves for work, and the first crews of ships endured the sea. History has noted many of these mutinies, but curtly; they are not matters to be dwelt on, most historians have felt; and the number of books describing them is very small. In English literature, since Defoe, no great writer has used the dramatic tension of mutiny in his fiction.¹ And the historical works in relation to the size and nature of their subject, are disappointing, with one exception.

We do possess one great book devoted to a mutiny: *The Floating Republic* by G. E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dobrée.² It is a work of accuracy and scholarship, complete with the original documents, petitions, letters, manifestos. But it is also a most vivid and brilliantly written description of stirring events; men live, blood is shed, there is agreement after desperate tension, there is final tragedy; and

¹ We have, however, an English translation of Plivier's *The Kaiser's Coolies*, and there is much material on the Indian Mutiny.

² *The Floating Republic: An Account of the Mutinies at Spithead and The Nore in 1797*: by G. E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dobrée, published by Geoffrey Bles, London, 1935.

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these things are woven with great art into a story that carries the reader in its grip.

This story is little known, and a short account of the mutinies of 1797 is therefore given in the third chapter of this book; almost all the materials for the relevant parts of this chapter, it is gratefully acknowledged, are taken from *The Floating Republic*. But the reader who wants more than so brief an account can give should turn to *The Floating Republic* itself.

It is strange that there is this lack of books on the mutinies of the past. They have had no small effect on events, shaking empires and social systems, ending wars and leading to considerable reforms. It seems probable that one reason for History's reticence is the difficulty in passing judgment on those who took part in these events. Mutinies—revolts by men under discipline of life and death—do not happen lightly; and in most cases when the reasons for a mutiny are sought, they appear clearly to be, in part, conditions of life that few of us could find tolerable. The puzzle becomes not why did the mutiny occur, but why did men, for years or generations, endure the torments against which in the end they revolted. And historians have been disinclined to dwell on mutiny, we believe, because they hate to dwell on conditions so unendurable that they make revolt seem natural and inevitable: conditions perhaps too closely paralleled in Europe to-day for academic ease.

There are those in Europe to-day who believe

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that force, embodied in armies, navies and air forces, is in the last resort the dominant factor in policy, in the relations between groups of men and women. They may be right or may be wrong; but if they neglect to reckon in their accounts the wills and human needs of the actual men who make up those armies, navies and air forces they are certain to prove wrong in the end. For in that case the statement "mutinies have happened" becomes the more dangerous but equally inevitable "mutinies happen". War on the grand scale seems, indeed, to have reached a state from which the only escape, the only way to get peace, is for mutiny on the grand scale to occur in one or both of the opposing forces. If, as some predict, and as many facts prove possible, some of the rulers of Europe mean war, they must also take the risk that this war's strain will prove unendurable, and that discipline, no matter how strong, will break under it.

This book, therefore, describing in part the mutinies of past centuries, in part those that ended or followed on the Great War, is written for those who wish to understand, as far as the past can help us to understand, one of the factors that may make history in the future, and seems to some of importance to-day in the maintenance of the peace of the world. For no ruler, whether dictator or "statesman", will risk war if it is clear to him that the bigger risk is real, that the weapons of war may break in his hands while he is using them.

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Mutinies have usually—not always—appeared to be failures. Behind this appearance there is a more complex reality. Mutinies, even if they are repressed, are so powerful in their impression on those who rule that great changes are made, great concessions given, after they have been “stamped out”. The leaders are executed; the reforms demanded are carried out. When, as in Tsarist Russia, a ruling class avoids this, it pays a price for its folly.

Wherever possible we have allowed the individuals or groups, whose actions are described, to speak for themselves. It is for the reader to judge if these words have a modern echo.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CRUCIFIED



THRACE is a bare strip of poor land between the Balkan mountains and the sea. It has no town that remains in the world's memory, no port from which ships of any mark have begun their course. It looks southward to the Greek islands and has never known their civilization. It is only parted by narrow gulfs from the city of Troy and the beaches of Gallipoli, but in all the wars that occurred between the great sieges across those gulfs Thrace never played much part, except as corridor for the marching armies. It is the road from Europe to Asia. Agamemnon went the straight way, across the sea, to the siege of Troy; so in the reverse direction did the Great King's army to defeat at Marathon; but almost all the other armies passing between Europe and Asia went through Thrace, in all the centuries between the beginning of warfare and the birth of Christ.

A hundred years before that birth the Thracians of the south, of the coast—not the wild tribes beyond the mountains, sometimes called Thracians also in

the legendary geography of that century—were despised as mongrels of many races, bastards of all the soldiers and camp followers of half the known world. Even to-day the skilful complicated German ethnographical maps of Europe¹ cover Thrace with patches of green for Turks, yellow for Greeks and blue for Bulgarians, cross-hatched with rainbow representation of Albanians, Shkipetars, Nogays and Cherkesses. In the hundred years before Christ these names would have stirred no interest in a Thracian, who knew so many names of strange peoples, names from the ever-passing armies of the kings of Macedon and of the consuls of the Roman Republic. So we cannot know what stock went to the breeding of the slave who fought Rome and shook Rome and broke some of her best legions, the Thracian, Spartacus.

He had been a soldier and was made a slave when captured in some forgotten battle. It may be as some historians suggest that he deserted from the Roman armies and was enslaved when recaptured by them, or it may be that he was employed by one of the many generals or consuls who revolted against their rivals in the struggle for power between individuals, and between the Senate and the Plebs of Rome, that had been going on for over a hundred years. However this may be, he was one of the many thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, added every year to

¹ Maps made, perhaps not quite to-day; ethnography to-day has been reduced to the simple question of Jewish great-grandmothers; but these maps were made not long ago.

the slave population of Italy. And that population was in continual stir, revolt, mutiny.

In the history of both Greece and Rome a whole section has been suppressed by the historians. The Romans said gloomily "So many slaves, so many enemies" and hastened to think of something else. Their historians have minimized or even refused altogether to mention the small slave revolts that broke out continually from the time when slavery first became a really large factor in social life. But in the two centuries before the birth of Christ the social organization of the Republic of Rome, torn by internal factions and overweighted with vast new wealth and vast responsibilities, failed completely to meet the strain of an enormous increase in the number of slaves compared with the number of free men and soldiers. A Greek island, Delos, had become the great slave market because it was "holy" and therefore had free trade. The slaves at Delos were not the first to revolt, but their mutiny spread the idea of a slave war against their owners throughout the ancient world. Before then there had been insurrections in Sicily, in which the slaves elected a king. And at Pergamon a stoic philosopher had raised the standard of universal brotherhood, an idea that vaguely and confusedly appealed to the slaves in Greece and Italy. Revolts occurred in many places where they were gathered in large numbers: the mines of Macedonia, no less horrible than those of Siberia under the Tsarist regime, the silver mines of

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Laurium, and the carpet manufacturies and workshops of Pergamon.

Spartacus was a slave. That meant that he had no property (except with his master's tolerance), no rights, and could expect only brutal labour, death when exhausted and unable to work further. But he was also a Thracian, and the Thracians, though they had never founded a great state or followed a king of their own who could make a mark in history, had a reputation among the Romans for fighting quality in the arena. They were one of the three races that the Romans preferred as gladiators. And Spartacus was sold to be a gladiator, either as a punishment—it was a recognized punishment for unruly slaves—or for commercial reasons; it was often easier to get a good price for a gladiator than for a domestic slave.

He was in the training-school for gladiators at Capua, a stifling town under the best conditions and intolerable for men penned and often shackled in an *ergastulum*, a barracks-prison for slaves who worked on the land or in a factory or in the arena. The ruins of Pompeii contain an *ergastulum* for gladiators, with skeletons of slaves in the cells. These cells are in some cases so small the men can scarcely have been able to stand upright, and many of the skeletons wear leg-irons.

Ahead of Spartacus was almost certain death: combats of gladiators had become so popular and were increasing so fast in size and number, and

were indeed needed so much as distractions in the feverish unhappy life of new-rich Rome, that a trained gladiator could seldom hope for release. No matter how fine his victories he would not, except by great good luck, win his freedom by them. And some day his opponent the net-man would throw skilfully enough to trap his sword-arm, or the three-pronged spear would slip in beneath his buckler, or his own short sword would break; then his life would be at the mercy of the mob in the amphitheatre, and mercy depended on their mood.

Spartacus, says the historian Appian,¹ "persuaded about seventy of his comrades to strike for their own freedom rather than for the amusement of spectators. They overcame the guards and ran away, arming themselves with clubs and daggers that they took from people on the roads, and took refuge on Mount Vesuvius."

It was the year 73 before the Christian era. Vesuvius had then long been inactive; there was not the continual waver of smoke, the open crater, that has existed now since A.D. 79. The slopes were cultivated, it may be presumed, up to the line of the old prehistoric crater, the *Mons Summanus*. Within that crater, which for half the circle forms steep cliffs, lies a valley impossible to cultivate, surrounding the present eruptive cone. (In the days of Spartacus, before the mountain broke out from its

¹ *The Civil Wars*, Book I, section 116 *et seq.* Horace White's translation.

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sleep, this cone was certainly smaller, and possibly non-existent.) The valley, when the seventy-four gladiators entered it, with a few slave-allies picked up on the march, must have been empty and eerie. We know that many superstitions clung to it; somewhere in its rock-slopes was, perhaps, the direct entrance to hell, the sally-port for those evils and devils in which all men, whatever their religion, believed.

It was courageous to seek this strange refuge, and successful. A scratch Roman force was taken up the mountain by a Roman prætor, Claudius Glaber¹; they neglected the northern and eastern cliffs as unclimbable, and began first to picket the slopes and then to raid in to the inner valleys. Spartacus led his column out over the cliffs to roll up the picket-line unexpectedly from the rear. It was a stroke of military genius, and gained for the slave army an immediate victory and rapidly spreading prestige. A second prætor, again with a scratch force, was sent; Spartacus attacked his force strung out along a mountain path and destroyed it. Appian writes of this: "Spartacus even captured the horse of Varinius; so narrowly did the very general of the Romans escape being captured by a gladiator." Some of those who were taken prisoner joined the mutiny.

During the winter, when armies seldom moved

¹ Prætors were magistrates with wide powers, under the two consuls. At this time there were usually eight prætors in Italy.

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in the ancient world, a flood of recruits came in to Spartacus, still at first centred on his stronghold in Vesuvius but controlling now villages and hill towns across Italy and to the south. He began his spring campaign with 70,000 men, divided in two armies, the second commanded by Crixus, a Gaul.

Most of these men, and many of the best of them from a military point of view, were slaves. But a certain number of freemen, and freedmen, ex-slaves, joined them, as they might have joined any army that seemed to promise a chance of revenge against the rich, the "polished and effeminate nobles" of the Senate and the new, stronger, millionaires. It was a period of hunger, following a long period of struggle between Senate and people. A leader of the people, Tiberius Gracchus, had proposed an agrarian law ending the impudent enclosures by which estates were being built up and freemen ousted: a law that has remained terrible in the memories of landowners and their friends for two thousand years; we shall hear it quoted, in a later section of this book, against the Levellers of Cromwell's day. Within the lifetime of older men who marched with Spartacus this struggle had ended with the people's defeat, and the Senate had decided that all occupied land was private property, not the Republic's. There followed a war for the citizenship of Rome, leading to "widespread economic distress and ruin" and "violent personal rivalries". Foreign wars on a larger scale than usual went on, producing

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a crop of conquering generals avid for power. The greatest, Sulla, took Rome by force: for the first time a consul entered the city at the head of the legions of the Republic. Later when this first Fascist was fighting in Asia his rivals took power; he came back to institute massacres and proscriptions on such a scale as to have "fatal results to economic prosperity"¹. Land that he had confiscated, and could not allot to his gorged friends and potential rivals, rotted unused.

These political events were partly symptoms, partly results of a process by which the old, narrow, moral-brutal, sober Republic of freemen was becoming a Republic of the rich—and of the property-less. Appian, a lawyer who understood the process on its economic side, explains:

The rich had got possession of the greater part of the undivided land. They trusted in the conditions of the time, that these possessions would not be again taken from them,² and bought, therefore, some of the pieces of land lying near theirs, and belonging to the poor, with the acquiescence of the owners, and took some by force, so that they now were cultivating widely extended domains, instead of isolated fields. Then they employed slaves in agriculture and cattle-breeding, because freemen would have been taken from labour for military service. The possession of slaves brought them great

¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

² The previous time, when "possessions were taken from them", referred to by Appian—who was no opponent of the rich, but rather a pedantic legal-minded gentleman—was the period of the Agrarian Laws.

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gain, inasmuch as these, on account of their immunity from military service, could freely multiply and have a multitude of children. Thus the powerful men drew all wealth to themselves, and all the land swarmed with slaves. The Italians, on the other hand, were always decreasing in number, destroyed as they were by poverty, taxes, and military service.¹

Another reason why the powerful swallowed up all the wealth of Italy is that animals, in Italy, need hill pasture for the summer and lowland pasture for the winter. The great landlord-ranchers could have both; the little men, employing only the labour of their own families and an occasional slave or hired man, had to lease either summer or winter pasturage at rents higher than they could afford.

For these reasons freemen came to the armies of the slaves, and villagers helped them, and the non-professional forces first sent against them showed no particular fervour. But all the same the movement was mainly a mutiny of slaves, and in the later campaigns Spartacus would not accept the services of deserters from the Roman armies, perhaps finding them impossible to control. Discipline seems to have been strict among the slave forces, and when Spartacus took a large city, Thurii, he is reported by Appian to have "prohibited the bringing in of gold or silver by merchants, and would not allow his men to acquire any, but he bought largely of iron and brass and did not interfere with those who

¹ *The Civil Wars*, I, 7.

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dealt in these articles". Iron and brass were used for making weapons and shields; Spartacus was refusing to permit his "slaves, deserters and riff-raff" (Appian) to be distracted by plunder from the need for struggle.

Even when his armies controlled all south Italy he saw that they could have no security within the country, and moved north towards the Alps; it is believed he planned to pass them and establish a free colony beyond the borders of the Roman colonies (which in those days did not go very far into Gaul, the modern France). But Crixus, unable to leave the glory and the booty of south Italy, would not follow, and Spartacus did not try to carry out his plan until a Roman consul, or one of his lieutenants, had destroyed Crixus and his 30,000 men. Then he moved north, and defeated in quick succession both the consuls, though each had two regular legions, troops almost invincible from Spain to Asia Minor.

But when they came to the Alps his men clamoured to go back. The year was ending; the cold of the great passes made them afraid; they had been born in many different countries but had lived long in rich and pleasant Italy; they had broken the consuls and the legions of Rome; why could they not go south again and make Italy secure for them, settle once and for all their dispute with the rich, by taking Rome? Why not? Their far-sighted leader cannot have believed in the possibility, but he

obeyed. He and his followers were in fact part of ancient society, the society dominated by Rome; they could not break out of it, beyond its grip. There is something almost symbolic in the roving of his armies from the far Alps to the southernmost toe of Italy, where Spartacus tried in vain to cross over into Sicily, with the aim of capturing the island and holding it—with its slaves already stirred by previous mutinies—against the power of Rome. It is as if these slaves knocked against all the walls that penned them in the prison of Italy and slave-based society, but could not break through; there was no exit from the ancient world, condemned to flower and rot in the shape dictated by its technique, its very limited control over nature.

Moving south, Spartacus may have sighted Rome; but the city was too strong for him even to attempt to storm it; he had few or none of the “machines” that were the seige artillery of the ancients.

“This war”, says Appian, “so formidable to the Romans (although ridiculed and despised in the beginning as being merely the work of gladiators) had now lasted three years. When the election of new prætors came on, fear fell upon all, and nobody offered himself as candidate until Licinius Crassus, a man distinguished among the Romans for birth and wealth, assumed the prætorship and marched against Spartacus.” Crassus was probably the richest man in Rome; on each side the campaign was led by men really representative of the forces at grips.

The *Cambridge Ancient History* describes Crassus as taking a slight reverse "as an excuse for decimating an unsteady cohort"; Appian, from rumours that were doubtless exaggerated, says that when Crassus took over "the two legions of the consuls" (there had been four, but had perhaps been reduced by losses to the strength of two) he decimated them by lot—killed every tenth man—for "their bad conduct in several battles". Appian continues:

Some say that Crassus too, having engaged in battle with his whole army and having been defeated, decimated the whole army and was not deterred by their numbers, but destroyed about 4000 of them. Whichever way it was, when he had once demonstrated to them that he was more dangerous to them than the enemy, he overcame immediately 10,000 of the Spartacans, who were encamped somewhere in a detached position, and killed two-thirds of them. He then marched boldly against Spartacus himself, vanquished him in a brilliant engagement, and pursued his fleeing forces to the sea, where they tried to pass over to Sicily. He overtook them and enclosed them with a line of circumvallation consisting of ditch wall and paling.

However much these tales may be exaggerated, it is clear that Crassus made his men feel that he was more dangerous to them than was the enemy. And he was, as the *Cambridge Ancient History* says, "by no means susceptible to the glory of facing fearful odds"; to the remnants of the consul's legions he added six more—a strain on Rome's over-

strained finances, a new burden for the freemen who must form the legions; but this war had to be ended.

The weakness of the slave army was that it had to scatter to live, and only by unremitting vigilance and discipline could the roving detachments be concentrated on the main body when Roman forces approached. It is unlikely that Crassus did in fact attack the main body of the slave army and defeat Spartacus: the latter until his final battle seems always to have been successful when his army was concentrated and under his own control. Crassus let the slaves move down towards their goal, the straits of Sicily, while he defeated and scattered detachments of their forces when he could. When they were huddled in the "toe" of Italy he still dared not attack them, but tried to wall them in—an effort that shows the great size of his army; his fortifications were thirty seven miles long. The pirates of the straits, from whom Spartacus had hoped to receive help in crossing, were afraid of Rome's power; his half-starved army had to break out again. This they did without much difficulty, for Crassus had made the obvious military mistake of trying to hold a long line with equal strength everywhere, while his opponent could concentrate all his army at one point in the line. Faggots were thrown into the ditch to fill it; the slave soldiers went over the wall on the shoulders, or the dead bodies, of their comrades, then battered down the

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wall and the palisade and moved off, their wagons, gear and women following.

But Spartacus and his followers had been weakened by lack of supplies, during the period while they negotiated with the pirates. And Crassus was now eager for action; the Senate, alarmed at the slowness of these trench-warfare methods, had called up the great Pompey and his legions out of Spain. Crassus wanted to finish the war successfully before Pompey arrived, so that the glory should not go to the more famous general; he gathered his army to pursue; Spartacus marched on *Brundisium*, the modern Brindisi, hoping to find in that port, then probably the largest in Italy, ships that he could seize, perhaps for a raid on Sicily, perhaps for passage to Greece or Macedonia or to his own homeland, Thrace. Near the port he learned that Lucullus had just reached it with veteran legions from the Black Sea and the east, fresh from victory over King Mithridates. Spartacus had no way of spreading "propaganda" among these camped troops; he could not even have known that they also, or some of them, had engaged in a serious mutiny during their campaign. The slave army sheered off from *Brundisium*; a third attempt had been made to break through the wall that penned them in, but the wall held.

There was trouble among his followers; two Gauls, Castus and Cannicus, split off with a detachment to go on looting forays, and at once got into

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trouble; Spartacus was able to rescue them from defeat once, but a little later the army of Crassus caught them and destroyed them. Perhaps the back of the revolt was broken then; among these raiders were wild spirits, active fighting men.

Spartacus [Appian says] despaired of everything and brought his forces, which were even then very numerous, to close quarters with Crassus. The battle was long and bloody, as might have been expected with so many thousands of desperate men. Spartacus was wounded in the thigh with a spear and sank upon his knee, holding his shield in front of him and contending in this way against his assailants until he and the great mass of those with him were surrounded and slain. The remainder of his army was thrown into confusion and butchered in crowds. So great was the slaughter that it was impossible to count them. The Roman loss was about 1000. The body of Spartacus was not found. A large number of his men fled from the battle-field to the mountains and Crassus followed them thither.

The name of the slaves' general went down the centuries as the greatest leader of those who stand, dumb and usually without weapons, at the basis of human society. When Liebknecht and his followers, in the German revolution of 1918, broke away from the old Social-Democratic Party, they took the name of the *Spartakus Bund*, and in the first stormy days of 1919, in Berlin beer-cellar or luxury hotel, panic spread among the war profiteers and their large women at the words echoing across twenty centuries: "Spartakus kommt!"

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Pompey arrived while Crassus was hunting the mountains for the scattered groups, all that was left of the slave army. Naturally he claimed a large share of the credit for ending the war; the *Cambridge Ancient History* says he "played the cad to gratify his invincible conceit". We need not be judges between Crassus and Pompey, between the richest man and the most arrogant militarist of Rome at that time. But it is significant that even in death and failure the slaves in revolt divided these leaders of the powerful, and memory of the ending of the revolt "always stood in their way of the effective co-operation" (*Cambridge Ancient History*). The slaves had failed; yet what they had done had its effect. They had shaken the stiff, old, unchanging oligarchy of the Roman republic; they had helped on the change towards the Empire; and in the Empire a much fuller, though still limited, sense of the rights of a human being found increasing expression.

"The slaves could defeat a Roman army, but they had nothing to put in the place of Rome," writes Jack Lindsay; "that was their tragedy: not their final defeat, but the emptiness of their triumph." They had no new way of producing goods, growing food, building society, to put in place of the old; they were a mutiny, an army, that could never become a revolution and a state.

But even in their death and defeat they broke ground not only for the evolving empire but for a new religion that would strengthen in many ways

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the idea of human freedom; they voiced in arms the distresses that were part of the background against which, or out of which, appeared Cæsar and Christ. And the Christian religion, for three hundred years a religion of the slaves and the broken freemen, the dispossessed, tolerated sometimes but often bloodily repressed, did throughout that period foster and increase the ideas and feelings that first made more humane the lot of the slave and then destroyed slavery.

Greatly and terribly, in their deaths, they helped to shape in men's minds and impress the symbol of that faith, the cross of a hundred years after them. For Rome took the revenge of the rich, and made of it something till then unknown in the world, something that must have spread through the mouths of men to the ends of the ancient world. The vultures of southern Italy, though doubtless more numerous then than now, must have been gorged by the feast Crassus gave them, unable to do more than take the tit-bits, a living eyeball here or there . . . Crassus hung the six thousand prisoners he had taken, alive, on crucifixes, along all the miles of road from Capua to Rome.

CHAPTER TWO

IN ARMS, IN JUDGMENT AND CONSCIENCE



THE road from London towards Cambridge bends through the small town of Ware. Near the road, on Corkbush Field, stand almost a third of the regiments of Cromwell's army. They are in good order, as befits victorious and veteran soldiers, infantry who have fought at Naseby, and cavalry of Cromwell's own "New Model" from East Anglia, the best equipped and best trained horsemen in Europe. But they are also in mutiny, or on the edge of mutiny, and against Cromwell.

The regiments have in most cases been hand-picked, carefully sorted out from among the other troops in and near London. They are those in which Cromwell has trust, the quiet and God-fearing men he knows. But two regiments, Robert Lilburne's cavalry and Thomas Harrison's infantry, have not been invited or ordered there; they have moved to Ware by forced marches, as if to a battle. Hearing that the meeting was to take place, and knowing the subjects to be discussed, they refuse to be left

out. A great majority of these two regiments belong to a fiery-minded intractable new group; they are Levellers.

The men on parade, a long line drawn up in battle formation, four ranks or eight in depth, present a curious spectacle. For most of them, and even many of their officers, wear in their hats or helmets a white paper. This is the "Agreement of the People", drawn up by the "agitators" who, two from each regiment, represent the rank and file of the army. It is a republican manifesto. It is a democratic list of demands and proposals. And therefore it is a manifesto against Cromwell, who is still negotiating with King Charles, and has never been and never will be much of a democrat. He considers the Agreement seditious.

The troops, hardy and eager, are in line early, although November in Hertfordshire—it is November 15th, 1647—is not kind climate. Four days previously the King fled from Hampton Court secretly; is it true that Cromwell helped him to escape? Is it true the King is now under safe guard at Carisbrook Castle, in the Isle of Wight? Is it a plot by the great gentlemen at the head of the army, a plot to get the King away from the power of the army itself? As the soldiers stand in rank they discuss these questions anxiously. Their lives, their religion, their conquests hang on these issues. Among them, from the earliest moment, ride Republican leaders: John Lilburne—the first of England's great line of

master-pamphleteers, out of prison for a change—Colonel Rainsborough, the bravest man at the storming of Bristol, the last great victory of the war in England, Major Scott, and other officers. Some of these, like Colonel Rainsborough, though of high rank are of plebeian origin and very close in thought and language to the rank and file. The men shout loudly their acceptance of the plea of these officers that they stand firm for freedom, for the "Agreement of the People". Cromwell rides onto the field, with Fairfax, great gentleman and nominally Cromwell's superior (whose first act it had been when Oxford, the King's "capital" was taken at last by his troops, to send a strong guard to preserve the Bodleian Library). With these two leaders are their staff, a little knot of horsemen. They ride first to the more moderate regiments. Before each regiment a "remonstrance" is read, answering the "agitators", and calling for the unity of the whole army to gain the demands agreed upon by all its representatives, the "agitators" included, assembled in Council. During and after the reading of this appeal, Cromwell and Fairfax and the others work along the front of the regiments, making short speeches and personal appeals to men they know. The whole army is only about fifty thousand men, and in this third of it, or quarter of it, there are many men whom Cromwell knows personally. There is a greatness in the man's bearing, and his prestige is invincible; the men listen to him. His

very English feeling for symbols is clear: he asks them for nothing except that they take the white papers out of their hats, the papers folded to show the motto: "England's Freedom—Soldier's Right." The first regiments obey. Others follow their example, even Harrison's infantry. The knot of horsemen moves on to face Robert Lilburne's cavalry, and is greeted by a grumbling shout of defiance.

As Fairfax reads the "remonstrance" to them, and before there has been argument or speeches, they interrupt him with taunts and cries. Cromwell rides forward. These are his own men, the cavalry, the arm that has made him. He orders: "Take those papers from your hats!" and rides among them snatching at the papers; his officers follow. The men are shouting defiance and refusal still, but not one man will in fact attack the General who has led them victoriously in so many struggles. Some resist, but defensively. Fourteen of these men Cromwell causes to be arrested. A court-martial is held: three are sentenced to death, there on the field. Cromwell lets them draw lots: two are freed, one, Richard Arnold, is executed.

Parliament later issues warrants for the arrest of Major Scott and Captain Bray, who defend the mutineers and claim that the court-martial is illegal, a violation of Parliament's Petition of Right by which courts-martial were abolished. Otherwise the matter is ended, the whole thing over. The two

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other meetings are formalities. The mutiny is suppressed. But the Republicans have now a martyr, Arnold; the Levellers work more definitely than before against the "gentlemen" leaders of the army. The fire is smouldering and will break out again.

Behind this little mutiny, which will grow into a much larger one in eighteen months time, there is a background of economic and social forces. And we must tell much of the history, complex and not widely known, of these troubled times if we are to make the roots of this mutiny clear, and show its true stature. The common people of England were unhappy and hungry; they expressed their desire for a change, for a new social order, partly by the formation of religious sects and socialist or even communist movements and groups, partly through the acts of the rank and file of the Parliamentary army. This army consisted mainly of pressed men; no other method of large-scale recruitment then existed. But they were also picked men, men of the New Model, yeomen or peasant farmers, handicraftsmen, independent producers in many trades. They did not feel themselves conscripts, and claimed that they were not mercenaries, but "free commoners of England drawn together and continued in arms in judgment and conscience for defence of their own and the people's rights and liberties". That was the claim they made, in direct opposition to Parliament, at a meeting on Newmarket Heath that we shall mention again.

ARMS, JUDGMENT AND CONSCIENCE

There was little industry in England at the time, and rather more people lived by commerce than by making things. Those employed in commerce and industry together were not an eighth of the number living by agriculture. The extreme Puritan sects and the Levellers' movements were therefore scarcely at all the representatives of the poorer townspeople; the men they represented were freeholders suffering from enclosures of common land, copyholders squeezed by the great landlords, and tenants at will even more severely rack-rented. "The rents of the seventeenth century," writes Thorold Rogers, "small as they seem to us . . . rapidly slid into famine rents . . . which leave the cultivator a bare maintenance, without the means of either improving or saving."¹ And below these rack-rented farmers, pressing dumbly on them, was a growing class of agricultural labourers, landless men, whose wages were settled by the Justices of the Peace under Queen Elizabeth's Statute of Labourers. These wages were about sixpence a day in summer and fourpence in winter; they were in general lower during the reigns of Charles I and Charles II than during the Commonwealth.

Feudalism and serfdom had passed into time's discard: now the yeomanry, "the plough in the hands of the owners" as Bacon phrased it, was passing also. In the Tudor period the change came

¹ Thorold Rogers (at one time Professor of Political Economy at Oxford), *The Economic Interpretation of History*.

that Sir Thomas More describes in his *Utopia*: "Your shepe that were wont to be so meke and tame, and so smal eaters, now, as I heare saye, be become so great devourers and so wylde that they eate up, and swallow downe, the very men themselves."¹ Men were flung out of the farmlands, that landlords might grow rich by selling wool. Along with this process went the Reformation, turning loose as landless men the folk of the monasteries, driving from the Church-lands the hereditary tenants and sub-tenants who would not or could not pay the rents claimed by the new rich who were making their fortunes from confiscated Church property. Then with the Stuarts came rack-renting and enclosures. These tendencies threatened the life of the yeomanry. That had been realized by many rulers, by Elizabeth and Bacon among them, and the Crown's policy in Tudor times had largely been directed towards protecting the tenant and keeping alive the free farmer. With the Stuarts this policy changed or was less effectively carried out. Within a hundred years from the meeting at Cork-bush Field the yeomanry had disappeared, was dead.

I most lament [wrote later the author of a pamphlet advocating large farms]² the loss of our yeomanry, that set of men who really kept up the independence of this nation; and sorry I am to see their lands now in the

¹ Thomas More, *Utopia*, Robinson's translation.

² *Inquiry into the connection of large farms, etc.* London, 1773, p. 133.

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hands of monopolizing lords, tenanted out to small farmers, who hold their leases on such conditions as to be little better than vassals.

The little farms were "melted up", as another indignant pamphleteer complained. England lost something thereby, and the day when that loss became certain was perhaps November 15th 1647, the place a field near Ware. Perhaps the day was that of the fight at Burford, in the larger mutiny eighteen months later.

The army represented a class threatened and desperate; it was the only army this class ever controlled in England's history. It became conscious of itself, to some extent but not to a sufficient extent for victory, and of its class needs and aims, during the struggle against Charles I and against Parliament. In that growth of consciousness, the realization of interests separate from the great landlords and gentlemen, the ideas of the Reformation played a great part. The fierce accusation that Martin Luther flung at usurers—following thereby the traditions of everything unspoilt in the Catholic Church which he was trying to reform—was developed by many sects of English Puritans to apply to the monopolizing landlord also. Luther had said:

Whoever eats up, robs and steals the nourishment of another, that man commits . . . murder. . . . Therefore is there, on this earth, no greater enemy of man (after the

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devil) than a gripe-money, and usurer, for he wants to be God over all men.¹

The nobles, new-nobles and great gentlemen who had for a hundred years been grabbing right and left the land of England, were not usurers, but they were "gripe-moneys". It is a natural and easy step from Luther's language to that of the author of a pamphlet published in 1648, which attacked all landlords. By God's ordinance, this pamphlet claims, all men had once been free "but man, following his sensuality, became an encloser, so that all the land was enclosed in a few mercenary hands and all the rest made their slaves". This pamphlet, *The Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, is one of the first documents of the modern revolutionary movement. There had been Communists of a sort before in the world, theoretical, philosophical, fanciful. Here in England for the first time was the voice of angry poverty attacking the whole economic order of society, and at the same time—this distinguishes it from the peasant-socialism of the Lollards or John Ball—attacking the religions and the priests, "these locusts".

Shakespeare had laughed at and despised the peasant socialism of Jack Cade's time: a messenger in *King Henry VI* brings news that Cade's army is at hand,

a ragged multitude

Of hinds and peasants, rude and merciless. . . .

¹ Martin Luther: *An die Pfarherrn*. Wittenberg, 1540.

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All scholars, lawyers, courtiers, gentlemen,
They call false caterpillars and intend their death.

In that queer last phrase Shakespeare picks out an enduring or recurring idea, or what we might to-day call a slogan, of the revolutionary movements during his century and that succeeding it. The rich were "caterpillars"—the word occurs often in Levellers' pamphlets—parasites. And particularly lawyers are attacked, the "horseleech lawyers". From this idea or slogan spring the first attempts at socialist economic theory, while the first socialist attempt at a theory of history is the Levellers' claim that all existing property rights are the product of the Norman Conquest. "The outlandish bastard William came to be king by conquest and murder," says the author of *The Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, and argues from this that all subsequent kings are "devil's children" and all the property rights in the country, admittedly deriving from the King, are no rights at all. This argument from the Norman Conquest, as all readers of Disraeli will know, has had more offshoots since those days in Conservative theory than in Socialist.

Buckinghamshire is not the county we should now expect to be a centre of subversive propaganda, but it is a natural area to voice the revolt of yeomen. And the light did not only shine in Buckinghamshire; pamphlets flared in most of the Home Counties, East Anglia and London. In London was John Lilburne, ablest leader of the Levellers.

Lilburne, younger son of a gentleman, was apprenticed to a London linen-draper and at the age of twenty or so was smuggling into the city pamphlets printed in Holland criticizing the King and his Government. Discovered, he fled to Holland, where he got more pamphlets printed. Returning to England in 1637, hoping that he was forgotten, he was at once betrayed by a spy who had been an ally.

On trial before the Star Chamber he refused to acknowledge the legality of that body's existence. He was fined, and sentenced to imprisonment until he acknowledged the jurisdiction of the Court, and ordered to be whipped in public and pilloried. He was whipped with a thonged lash, on the bare back, from Ludgate to Westminster, and was nearly unconscious when they asked him if he would confess error and thus escape the pillory. He refused, and threw among the crowd three copies of the "libels" he had helped to distribute. He also made a speech, until officials gagged him. His back raw, he had to stand in the noon sun for an hour and a half with a canvas gag in his mouth. He was unbroken, quietly defiant, at the end of this torture—and at the end of his imprisonment, more than two years later.

His liberation was Parliament's work: the great Parliament that forced King Charles to sacrifice Strafford, his strongest counsellor, and to abolish the Star Chamber. And the member of Parliament

who moved that Lilburne's petition be heard was an East Anglian squire, who had never spoken before, Oliver Cromwell. Lilburne and others, released, entered London to the ringing of bells and cheers of the crowd.

When the quarrel of King and Parliament reached the pitch of warfare, John Lilburne fought in the first battles; after a year's captivity at the hands of the King's forces, he was exchanged for Royalist prisoners and made a major in the cavalry, on Cromwell's recommendation. In May 1644 he had risen to be Lieutenant-Colonel. He distinguished himself in action, was shot through the arm in June of that year, yet by July 2nd was back and leading his men at the great victory of Marston Moor.

He helped Cromwell to rid himself of the leadership of Manchester and other generals who refused to press the King too hard. But Cromwell had a harder task; he was leader of what would be termed now a "popular front" and he had a very difficult job holding it together. Within the army itself there was, at this time, no difficulty; the strain came from Parliament, which wished to repress within the army the "sectaries"—Anabaptists, Baptists, Fifth Monarchy Men, Independents, and others. Cromwell, during all the period of the Civil War, is continually arguing, by letter and in speeches, that these men are good soldiers: "Sir, they are trusty, I beseech you, in the name of God, not to discourage them," he wrote to the Speaker of the

Commons after the battle of Naseby. Lilburne was Cromwell's supporter in this struggle for toleration.

Parliament's opposition to the "sects" was a political and economic opposition under a religious guise. The poet Edmund Waller admitted this when he spoke in the Commons in 1641, against a proposal to abolish the bishops:

For I look upon episcopacy as a counterscarp, or outwork; which, if it be taken by this assault of the people, and, withal, this mystery once revealed, "that we must deny them nothing when they ask it thus in troops", we may, in the next place, have as hard a task to defend our property, as we have lately had to recover it from the Prerogative. If, by multiplying hands and petitions, they prevail for an equality in things ecclesiastical, the next demand perhaps may be *Lex Agraria*, the like equality in things temporal.¹

In this argument is revealed the root connection between maintaining a bureaucracy of priesthood (most of Parliament, during the Civil War, wanted this to be in the Presbyterian form, but as Milton said "New Presbyter is but old Priest writ large") and maintaining property, staving off the yeoman's scarcely yet uttered threat of an "Agrarian Law", such as that maintained for a time in ancient Rome by Tiberius Gracchus, which would tend towards economic equality. Later the connection was made even more clear, when two thousand people from Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire petitioned Par-

¹ Eduard Bernstein: *Cromwell and Communism*, p. 54.

liament for the abolition of tithes. Some of the members of the House of Commons (which refused to entertain the petition) observed that "tenants who wanted to be quit of tithes would soon want to be quit of rent. Nine-tenths were due to the landlord on the same ground that one-tenth was due to the minister."¹

It may be useful to remind readers who did not get the sound religious education received by the author of this book that one of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England begins: "The Riches and Goods of Christians are not common, as touching the right, title, and possession of same, as certain Anabaptists do falsely boast." The Presbyterians of the Parliament that fought King Charles were no less certain than the ecclesiastical dignitaries who framed the articles of faith of the Church of England that property is a Christian institution. And among Cromwell's men there were many besides Anabaptists who challenged property rights.

To a pamphlet calling for the repression of the sects, written by a leader of the Parliamentary Presbyterians, John Lilburne replied claiming religious freedom. A "Great Assembly of Divines" had been meeting, on and off, for years at Westminster, and the Presbyterian majority in it stormed repeatedly at "the monstrous doctrine of liberty of conscience". Lilburne, effective and popular jour-

¹ Gardiner: *History of the Great Civil War*, Vol. III, p. 124.

alist, coined for them the phrase "an assembly of Dry-vines", and the phrase stuck to this unending and ineffective assembly. His pamphlet was hard-hitting; Parliament condemned it as "scurrilous, libellous and seditious". A prosecution was begun and Lilburne—later this became his custom—wrote another pamphlet to prove that the prosecution was unjust. He was arrested for contempt of court, and petitions on a monster scale were needed to secure his release after many months' imprisonment without trial.

In prison, in those days, there was not the benevolent custom of to-day which forces a politician, imprisoned for opposition to the government, to spend his time sewing mail-bags; nor was there the present ban on the entry of political news into prison. While jailed Lilburne wrote two pamphlets of which the titles are a good description:

England's Birthright justified against all arbitrary usurpation, whether regal or parliamentary, or under what vizer soever; with divers queries, observations, and grievances of the people, declaring this Parliament's present proceedings to be directly contrary to those fundamental principles whereby their actions were at first justified against the King.

England's Lamentable Slavery, proceeding from the arbitrary will, severity and fullness of Parliaments, covetousness, ambition and variability of priests, and simplicity, carelessness and cowardliness of people.

These appeared a few days after his liberation.

Others followed and a string of legal cases grew out of them. Finally the House of Lords—whose jurisdiction he refused to acknowledge—sentenced Lilburne to seven years in the Tower of London. He was let out on bail within the year, as a sequel to the agitation of his party—for he now had a following that could get 10,000 signatures in London alone (London of the 1640's), to a petition for his release. He was sent back to the Tower again, because he began his agitation as soon as released. And he was released yet again under popular pressure.

In March 1647 the House of Commons ordered one of his pamphlets to be burnt by the common executioner. The grounds for this order were that the pamphlet attacked the constitution—in favour of a more powerful Parliament! We may well believe that the real grounds were that the pamphlet also called for the abolition of tithes and trade monopolies; Parliament had handed out more of these monopolies to rich men of the City of London than the King had ever done to his supporters. The pamphlet also demanded reform of legal procedure and of the law.

This was the man who led and stirred the "left wing" of the army. In or out of jail, his words told, until the army was considered by an observer "one Lilburne throughout, and more likely to give than to receive laws."¹ With him worked half a dozen

¹ Gardiner: *History of the Great Civil War*, Vol. III, p. 245.

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high officers; while many pamphleteers of varying value, and speakers—then, of course, preachers—including the “Digger” Winstanley, wrote or preached in guises, varying from bibliolatry to atheism the unvarying message of revolutionary attack on the landlord, the priest or presbyter, the lawyer and the King.

When the first phase of the Civil War ended, early in 1646, Parliament naturally did its utmost to reduce the size of the army, and to scatter its regiments. The army would have none of it; these pressed men, conscripts, were not going home. The rank and file built up an organization of delegates, the “agitators”, which the officers and Cromwell had to accept and with which they formed a “Council of the Army”. This Council found it impossible to reach agreement with Parliament; and during all their discussions the King, in comfortable captivity, played off one side against the other, and dangled baits before the Presbyterians, the Scotch, the Independents, the Army, and its leaders, with a fine impartiality. Lilburne’s followers increased their pressure, and Cromwell’s disgust with Parliament increased: he realized more and more fully that the struggle between Parliament and Army must be ended somehow or the King would get power back, end the Revolution and wipe out its leaders. These factors combined to press the army to action. A big rally of regiments at Newmarket Heath agreed to the manifesto already mentioned,

to "continue in arms in judgment and conscience . . . we as private men, or other the free-born people of England, shall not remain subject to the like oppression, injury, or abuse as has been attempted" (by the majority in Parliament).

Soon another larger meeting, 21,000 men in the ranks, at Triploe Heath near Cambridge, proved to the army leaders that it was time to act. The army moved on London. Parliament might have hesitated to defy these superb troops, veteran and well-equipped. (The Presbyterian-persecutor majority had already become rather shaky: Lilburne's pamphlet, a few months earlier, had been ordered to be burnt by a majority of only ninety-four to eighty-six.) But the rich men of the City of London, or some of them, arrogant and truculent, forced the hand of the parliamentary leaders, and gave the army's chiefs a valuable political opportunity. These rich men organized a rabble of apprentices—won over, for the moment, by hastily passed measures relaxing the Puritan repression of games and holidays—discharged soldiers, sailors and broken men, to invade Parliament, chase out the Independents (the minority) and cheer on the hesitant majority to pass measures and resolutions directed against the army. A fortnight later—Cromwell knew how to give his opponent rope—the army entered London "in order to protect Parliament". Eleven Presbyterian leaders were expelled from Parliament as having helped to "terrorize" the

House, eight of them fled the country. Cromwell took his seat in the House, and with a hand on his sword-hilt moved the annulment of all the measures passed while the House had been "terrorized". After his speech some of the Presbyterians decided to stay away from the House; the majority thus inclined still more towards moderation and impotence, Independents and hesitant Presbyterians combining to negotiate with Cromwell and separating to intrigue with the King.

Now the army was in control. But it neither cleansed Parliament thoroughly nor decided the fate of the King, nor settled the constitution and economic future of the country, nor made any apparent approach to these things. The King, at Hampton Palace, was courted by representatives of all parties—except the rank and file of the army. These, sullen with disappointment and nervous of the future, drew up the "Agreement of the People" that the troops wore in their hats at Corkbush Field.

Parliament proclaimed the Agreement seditious and threatened prosecutions. The storm woke then, and only the personal strength of one man, Cromwell, the most able soldier England had produced and the most progressive and tolerant spokesman of his class (that of the great gentlefolk) stood between the angry men of the army and their aims: an immediate purge of Parliament, an immediate trial of the King, and the beginning of a series of political

and social reforms. Yet within a few months the first two of these aims had been decided upon by the army leaders, within a few more months they were carried out. By that time the Levellers were bitterly in opposition because no approach had been made to the third aim.

Pressure of the rank and file of the army could not drive the army's leaders to decisive political action; but the King and his supporters did so. The Second Civil War broke out. It was a dear year, 1648, a year of hunger. In May, Kent, Essex, Wales were alight "for God and King Charles"; the previous month a three-days rising of the apprentices had to be crushed in London; a Scottish force was preparing to march south. Cromwell destroyed the rising in Wales, and, against heavy odds, broke up the Scots. It was during this Second Civil War that the leaders of the army decided to call the King to account. It is probable that they had previously refused to go ahead with the trial because of the fear of just such a campaign as that then in progress.

The wire-pullers of the City of London, who had backed the gentlemen apprentices against Cromwell but dared not oppose him too openly themselves, loosed against him what they hoped would be a deadly antagonist. They had John Lilburne in prison; they let him out, and at the same time settled, unexpectedly and in his favour, a claim to which he was entitled. A legal compensation for

imprisonment by the Star Chamber, due to him for years, was voted in the form of lands, greater in value than the amount due.

This was clearly an attempt to bribe and use Lilburne against Cromwell, then engaged in the North against the Scots. It failed; Lilburne, no mean political strategist and an honest man, wrote to his ally and opponent:

Although, if I prosecuted or desired revenge for an hard and almost starving imprisonment, I could have had of late the choice of twenty opportunities to have paid you to the purpose, I scorn it, especially when you are low, and this assure yourself, that if ever my hand be upon you, it shall be when you are in your full glory, if then you shall decline from the righteous way of Truth and Justice, which, if you will fixedly and impartially prosecute, I am, yours, to the last drop of my heart's blood (for all your late severe hand towards me) John Lilburne.¹

From this letter and its effect on Cromwell dates a new unity between the army leadership and the Levellers, strong enough to gain the army's two first demands, a purge of Parliament and a trial of the King. Then came the question of the future of England, and the allies divided again, each following their class interests.

This unity had persisted, through difficult negotiations and much hard effort on the part of the Levellers to keep in with their allies, until a new

¹ E. Bernstein, *Cromwell and Communism*, p. 74.

"Agreement of the People" was reached. It was drafted by four Levellers, including Lilburne, four representatives of the army leadership, and four of the Independents in Parliament. This mixed commission, set up before the execution of the King, found that it was possible to unite on an Agreement: but the army "Grandeess", under Cromwell's influence, did nothing to press the Agreement upon Parliament. Cromwell's fear was that Parliament, if the Agreement was accepted, would have to be re-elected, and he knew that the majority of the gentlefolk were against a continuance and deepening of the revolution. He believed that even if the franchise was extended, these gentlefolk would sway the elections enough to make the new Parliament a stronghold of reaction. For these reasons, and others of a like nature, he made it easy for Parliament to shelve the Agreement, which became the political programme of the Levellers in and out of the army.

When Lilburne and the Levellers found, in January 1649, that the new Agreement was to be just a pious piece of paper, to be considered someday, they broke away from the conferences in disgust. On May 1st when a second edition of the Agreement came out it was published from the Tower, where Lilburne was again shut up.

Meanwhile the King had been tried and executed, and the House of Lords abolished.

These things did not satisfy the army's insistent demand for action, for an extension of the revolution.

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People in London and in the army began to wear sea-green ribbons, the badge of the Levellers. The new "Agreement of the People" spread everywhere.

It is a remarkable document. It claims adult suffrage—election of a parliament by "all men of age"—with the exception, significant and to us curious, of those receiving wages. (To the yeomen and small farmers turned soldiers who were mainly responsible for the Agreement, those receiving wages were "servants" of gentlefolk, bound to be influenced by them in a reactionary direction.) This parliament would be the supreme authority of the nation.

Cromwell was very doubtful of the safety of universal suffrage; in one of his papers it was condemned as a proposal of "Switzerizing anarchists".

Annual parliaments, complete religious toleration, no tithes, tolls or taxes of the old sort—only a tax on property—are among the demands of the agreement, which is in all respects, except the restriction of "servants" from the franchise, as "left" or advanced or revolutionary a document as that round which the Chartist movement gathered nearly two centuries later.

The anger of the regiments, in particular those quartered near London, grew rapidly during the first three months of the year; the grim scene on a Whitehall scaffold on January 30th seems almost a distraction, a circus offered to the cold people, and looks strangely old-fashioned, out of the past,

when seen against the background of the modern ideas, the plans and parties of to-day and to-morrow, pamphlets, leaflets, demonstrations, surging in the cities and the army. Of the pamphlets the two most important were Lilburne's *England's New Chains Discovered* and a *Letter to General Fairfax* by eight men in the army; three of these recanted at their trial—for the protest was so clear and so well-phrased that they were at once court-martialled—but the other five stood firm in their accusations, which included an attack on Cromwell whom they charged with desiring to be King. They held to their written declaration: "We are English soldiers engaged for the freedom of England and not outlandish mercenaries to butcher the people for pay to serve the pernicious ends of ambition." They were expelled from the army, after being led past their companies seated backwards on a wooden horse; their swords were broken over their own heads.

The Levellers' pamphlet protesting against the court-martial and repeating the soldiers' accusations was called *The Hunting of the Foxes from Newmarket and Triploe Heath to Whitehall by five small Beagles, late of the Armie, or the Grandee Deceivers unmasked*. It is "printed in a corner of freedome right opposite the Council of Warre". The "foxes" are Cromwell and his "grandee" colleagues of the Council of War (which should not be confused with the Council of the Army containing "agitators" as

well as officers). Newmarket and Triploe Heath were the meeting-places already mentioned where, the Levellers believed, the "grandees" had agreed with them to move against Parliament and King Charles, and carry forward the revolution. Lilburne followed this pamphlet with one still more scathing, and was arrested. Parliament proclaimed those who distributed this pamphlet "enemies of the Commonwealth".

It is said that the petition for Lilburne's immediate release bore eighty thousand signatures. Lobbying began, deputations to Parliament as a whole, or to individual members. One, all of London women, was told to go home: "wash your dishes!"

The ferment grew. Parliament decided—or rather the new Council of State set up by Cromwell decided, and Parliament agreed willingly—to divide up the army and send a number of regiments to Ireland, where rebellion for King Charles and rebellion for Ireland held uneasy alliance. But the regiments remembered that not long ago Parliament itself had refused to act against a foreign enemy until it had settled matters with the King. Regiments proclaimed their refusal to go to Ireland.

Cromwell began to move regiments from their accustomed quarters to new ones, so that they might get accustomed to moving, and to obeying orders. Dragoons in London refused to move and seized their regiment's colours from the colour-sergeant. Next day Cromwell was upon them, with argument

and the threat of attack. He had reliable soldiers in hand and brought them with him.

Fifteen men remained firm when the regiment sullenly submitted. They were court-martialled as ringleaders; five were sentenced to death. As he had done before, Cromwell requested freedom for four; the lot chose Robert Lockyer to be shot. He was twenty-three years of age and a veteran of six years' war, having fought from the beginning. "Never man died more comfortably than I do," he said proudly, encouraging his comrades. His funeral was London's greatest political demonstration during the revolution. And from the Tower Lilburne put in cold print "that it is both treason and murder for any General or Council of War to execute any soldier in time of peace by martial law". He quoted Parliament's "Petition of Right"; the fourth clause abolished martial law. He quoted the Newmarket agreement between the officers and "agitators" of the army. This "letter from our causeless, unjust and tyrannical captivity in the Tower of London" is a declaration of war. Mutiny, on a large scale, followed it.

At a review of troops in Hyde Park Cromwell was able, by making promises that could not and were not kept, to get the soldiers to remove the Levellers' green ribbons from their hats. All they desired should be done, he said; even their pay—usually from three months to a year in arrears—would be more punctually found for them. Again

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as at Corkbush Field, it was touch and go, an effort in which the last reserve of the "gentlemen", Cromwell's personality and prestige, just carried the day. Well for him he did so, for regiments at Banbury and Salisbury were in open revolt. The "Levellers' War", mutiny carried to the length of armed conflict, had begun.

The mutineers marched out rapidly, to bring their forces together; but they were not yet ready to fight. These men were at war; but they could not feel themselves to be at war. They did not try to rush the first force opposed to them, in size less than a quarter of their own, at Newbridge. They did not capture Cromwell's emissaries but let them speak as they would, not only to leaders but to others. They were united, but within their minds were many strange and conflicting ideas, the tendencies that later flowed in many directions. There was the tendency that later shaped into the "Diggers" or "True Levellers", who retired from the social struggle, the effort to convince and reach agreement with their fellows by argument and example in places where their fellows naturally gathered, and founded a little Communist Utopian colony on the slopes of Box Hill in Surrey. This colony, forerunner of many others projected and a few established for short periods, and led by Winstanley, a philosophical pamphleteer of great energy who may have been part author, years ago, of *The Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, was still three years in

the future; but the longing to withdraw from the fight that is an ingredient in the establishment of all such colonies must have been in the minds of many of the men who mutinied. They were not carrying on war against Cromwell; they were seeking to get back to the other regiments with whom they hoped to argue, seeking to join hands again with the stirred masses of London. They were retreating into the crowd just as Winstanley and his "Diggers" retreated, after their defeat, away from the tamed or disappointed and now hostile crowd.

Another tendency that was of more importance began to take shape in 1650, the year after the Levellers' defeat, when George Fox, founder of the Quakers, began to make many converts. "They flocked to him from all parts," writes Bernstein,¹ "a large contingent coming from the former soldiers of Cromwell's army, who owing to their discontent with the course of events, had either obtained their discharge or been dismissed from the army." And, as he points out, this was natural: "the civil war had claimed untold sacrifices, without any satisfactory result; political struggles had succeeded each other without bringing a solution of social difficulties any nearer; men who had been hailed as deliverers, when once raised to power, assumed the mien of oppressors, and thus the conclusion seemed inescapable that the chief evil lay in *man*

¹ Eduard Bernstein: *Cromwell and Communism*, H. J. Stenning's translation, pp. 227-28.

himself, in the *weakness* of human nature, which the existing Churches had proved powerless to overcome."

This feeling, which led even Lilburne to the Quakers towards the end of his life, must have been present among the followers of Lilburne, who rose against Cromwell without their imprisoned leader.

In Oxfordshire a Captain Thompson led 200 dragoons of the regiment to which the dead lad Lockyer had belonged—scattered since their mutiny throughout the counties. In Wiltshire almost a whole regiment put themselves under Ensign Thompson, brother of the captain. To these were, in a day or so, added the regiment commanded by Ireton, Cromwell's right hand, and Harrison's infantry, who had marched to Corkbush Field eighteen months ago, and a third regiment. Nearly all were old soldiers; the cavalry under Ensign Thompson, in their manifesto, declared that they had sold their farms or given up their businesses at the beginning of the war to fight tyranny.¹

Cromwell was no Utopian and no Quaker; he marched with the one aim: to fight. He heard the news, probably on May 10th; by May 12th he was at Andover, on the way to Salisbury, with four thousand reliable troops. There he learnt that the mutineers were marching north. He sent emissaries to delay them, to promise them a hearing, and

¹ *The Unanimous Declaration of Colonel Scroope's and Com.-General Ireton's Regiments.* Old Sarum, May 1649.

marched north to intercept them. The mutineers failed to cross the Thames, held by a regiment of Cromwell's cavalry, at Newbridge; but crossed elsewhere, by fording and swimming, and pushed on to Burford, where at nightfall they met Captain Thompson's handful from Oxfordshire. His two hundred had been scattered by a brush with troops commanded by his own colonel, and he brought little reinforcement to the tired and wet men who went to rest in the little town, reassured by Major White, Cromwell's emissary there, that the great and terrible General had the friendliest feelings for them, and that he, Major White, thought their demands reasonable. Perhaps because of their weariness, or their Quaker-Utopian ideas, no sentries were posted, or not enough. Or perhaps a quartermaster won over by the arguments of Major White led Cromwell's troops past the sentries he had posted. The mist that covers mutinies hangs over Burford.

The slackness of the guard kept may also have been due to the knowledge that Cromwell was far to the south of them—or rather, that he should be. He had covered forty miles the day before, with his four thousand; he covered fifty miles that day, with a picked half of his force. And after a short rest outside Burford, his men went in and fell on the sleeping Levellers.

The Levellers fought desperately, but were overwhelmed. They gathered in the torch-smoked dark, and four hundred survivors defended themselves

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until given assurance that they would be pardoned. Others scattered and left their arms and horses behind. A small group, led by Captain Thompson, fighting like English yeomen, cut their way to where their hobbled horses slept or grazed, and trotted north—two weak squadrons, not two hundred men.

The four hundred, in spite of the promise of pardon, were court-martialled next day. Four were sentenced to death and young Ensign Thompson and two corporals were shot. One of these “bade the soldiers do their duty; looking them in the face till they gave fire”. We can be sure that the other two also died “not showing the least kind of terror or fearfulness of spirit”. One recanted, was contrite, and was pardoned. Probably he only bought a few months more of life for the four hundred were sent, with other regiments, to the victorious misery of the Irish campaign.

After the execution Cromwell preached in church to the surrendered mutineers, and won their assent, forced or willing, to the abandonment of all “seditious” intentions. Then he rode to Oxford, where he and Fairfax received honorary degrees, while Parliament in London was resolving to tender them the nation’s thanks, and in the City of London the great merchants were preparing a lavish banquet in their honour. At this banquet they gave Cromwell and Fairfax gold dishes and plates; they gave £400 also for the poor of London. They knew well enough the class force behind

the Levellers' mutiny. They had been scared.

The day before the banquet they had published a final "startling disclosure"—as a modern journalist might phrase it—of the Leveller's creed: "the immortality of the soul they flatly deny . . . they will have no man to call anything his . . . particular property is devillish, the mystery of Egyptian bondage." The Levellers "raise the servant against the master, the tenant against the landlord, the buyer against the seller". The *Morning Post* is in the English tradition—of a sort.

While the rejoicings went on, Captain Thompson's squadrons surprised Northampton. Half-equipped, and half-armed, and almost wholly out of ammunition, they seized there all they needed—except a printing press. They did not think of that, perhaps; perhaps Northampton had none. They took a small cannon; but what they needed was a pamphlet to give the people news of their continued existence. Other regiments, tamed not yet, or only half tamed, knew nothing of them.

They were too tiny a group to fight the regiments that closed in on them, and when faced by superior forces the men surrendered unconditionally. They too, probably, found Ireland a home, either as corpses or as exile settlers. But Captain Thompson, a leader found too late, went off alone and for days defied the hunt. Cornered, he fought single-handed over a hundred men. Bleeding from many wounds he would not surrender alive, despite the odds and

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his opponents' promises. When the seventh bullet struck him, he fell.

With him fell the hopes of the Levellers, and of the yeomen, the free farmers and peasants, of this country.

CHAPTER THREE

HEARTS OF OAK



NEARLY four years of war had gone by at the beginning of 1797. As many of us know too well, four years of war can seem like an eternity; and these had been years of failure, disappointment, defeat. A general called Bonaparte had driven the English forces from Toulon, and had conquered Italy; England's allies, at the beginning of the war numerous and apparently powerful, had failed everywhere. Ireland on the verge of rebellion, Consols down to 50, a run on the Bank of England—it was a black winter. Lit by one fine brightness: in February the Navy, under Sir John Jervis and Commodore Nelson, had won a clean victory off Cape St. Vincent. The wooden walls were sound.

Old Lord Howe, retired from the sea after *his* victory nearly three years before, on “the glorious First of June”, went down to Bath that February. A bad attack of gout plagued him. Eleven letters, reaching him in batches, plagued him still more. All were phrased in the same way; all petitioned for an increase in the Navy's wages; all were signed

only by names of ships lying at Spithead. Lord Howe cursed the sea-lawyer who had, as he thought, drafted and written out all these letters, handed them over to the Admiralty when he went back to London, and did nothing more. There was nothing for him to do. The Lords of the Admiralty also did nothing, with less excuse. They had received other petitions, many others. It was less than seamanlike to ignore such signs of coming weather.

While Lord Howe's crutches were to be heard in Bath, and in Whitehall the quiet proper to Lords of the Admiralty was still unbroken by the storm to windward, a village schoolmaster was being taken from a debtor's prison in Scotland, bound for the Navy. Manwaring and Dobrée¹ describe this young man, Richard Parker:

Thirty years of age, of medium height and well built, swarthy, with vaguely aquiline features marked by large dark eyes expressive below his black hair, which he wore long, there was something about the arch of the brow, the set of the nervous lips and chin, and the indrawn cheeks, which, added to a general delicacy, marked him out as very different from the usual seamy scum which oozed from a debtor's prison. He was desperately poor, he explained unnecessarily, a married man pursued by ill-luck, trying to make a living by forcing elementary knowledge into the skulls of snivelling infants; and being caught in usurious toils, had accepted a quota of twenty guineas to gain his freedom.

¹ In their book, *The Floating Republic*, from which other material is taken for this study. It is referred to on page 9 of the Preface.

Yes, he had been to sea before; he had even, indeed, been a midshipman in the *Mediator* in 1783, and had earned some prize-money. That was all he told Lieutenant Watson of the Leith tender: there was a good deal more to tell, but Parker was all on edge, his nerves were frayed, and he was so depressed by the prospect that lay before him, so tortured, perhaps, by the consciousness of his failure in the past, his vision of himself as a pawn of misfortune, that on the journey to Sheerness he sought an end to his troubles by throwing himself overboard.¹

What Parker did not tell was that he had been court-martialled when a midshipman, for a trivial offence, and disgraced. He did not tell the whole story of illness and hopelessness, incurable rheumatism, that brought him in the end, as similar stories were at that time bringing many, to the Nore.

The press-gang had failed to supply enough men to keep the increased Navy on a war footing. Between 1792 and 1794 the number on the rolls had risen from 16,000 to 85,000 men. So each port had to supply a "quota" of men, and each county. Parker was such a "quota-man" and represented a new type, not previously known in the Navy: men who had failed in some trade or profession, landed in debt; they took the bounty offered—£10 to £70—to pay their debts and sold themselves thus to service under conditions now scarcely credible.

The able seaman then received six shillings a week, the ordinary seaman four shillings and nine-

¹ *The Floating Republic*, pp. 121-2.

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pence. Deductions for one thing or another might halve these amounts; and each man had to buy his "slops" (clothing and bedding), get extra food, and, if married, support his family. Pay was kept in arrears, often for two years, sometimes for more. It had not been increased since the days of the Commonwealth. Even when ships were "paid off" the men did not always get all they were owed. In April 1797 the Navy office estimated that "men unpaid on books of ships paid off" had, at the end of the previous year, been owed £435,395.¹ The food was worse than the pay; meat "was sometimes years old, shrunk hard as wood (carved into boxes it took a very pleasant polish), and was largely bone and gristle, or inedible fat . . . cheese was lively with long red worms". The peas "would not break". Boiled for eight hours on end, they emerged "almost as hard as shott". And in the weighing of the food the custom was to give fourteen ounces to the pound, or according to another account, the "Roman weight" of twelve ounces to the pound. The water was slimy, foul with green growths, "stuff that beasts would cough at". No leave was allowed. Overcrowding in the ships was appalling. The life of a man on a naval vessel, according to Nelson, was on an average "finished at forty-five years".² It seems marvellous that men could, on the average, endure twenty years

¹ Commons Journals, 52, p. 505, quoted by Manwaring and Dobrée.

² Memorandum on the State of the Fleet, 1803, Ad. 1580.

of such conditions. Doctoring, when the surgeon was an honest man, was an almost impossible job. And not all the doctors were honest men. The crew of the *Minotaur* complained that their surgeon did not visit the sick for two or three months together, was drunk when he did visit them, and did not give them "such nourishments as is allowed by Government, and for the want of which many men has died in this ship. There as been men went down to him for relief when sick, and he as told them that a flogging would do them most good".

There was plenty of flogging.

During the whole period of the war letters had been coming to the Admiralty, piteous, confident that they would get justice, badly spelt. Men of the *Weazle* sloop said their lieutenant, when drunk, amused himself "by making us strip and ceasing (seizing) us up to the riggin and beating us with the end of rope till we almost expire". Others wrote:

We are nockt about so that we do not no what to do. (*Winchelsea*)

It is almost impossible for us to put it down in paper as cruel as it really is with flogging and abusing above humanity. (*Nassau*)

We are slaves . . . treatment and bad usages is anufe to make the sparites of Englishmen to rise and steer the ship into the enimes port. (*Shannon*)

We suffer "beating, blacking, tarring, putting our heads in bags" and for breaches of discipline are forced to "drink half a gallon of salt water". (*Glory*)

Flogging is carried on to extremes, one man received

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three dozen for what was termed silent contempt, which was nothing more than this. After being beat by a Boatswain's mate, the man smiled, this was the unpardonable crime. Another was flogged for not going up the rigging quick enough, and another for not sending him down as was supposed smart enough. In short the number that has been flogged for trifling offences would be too tedious to mention at present. . . . When engaged with the enemy off Brest, March 9th, 1797, they even beat us at our quarters tho' on the verge of eternity and said I'll beat you until I make you jump overboard, damn you, you rascal, etc. Jump overboard or be God Damd. I will not send a boat after you. . . . Is this the way to encourage service? (*Nymphe*)

You confidently tell us [says one of the Petitions of the Seamen of the Fleet (Admiralty 1, 5125)] that our King is a father to us and our officers friends. They are so, we must confess, in some respects, for indeed they use us like children in whipping us into Obedience. As for English Tars to be the Legitimate sons of Liberty, it is an old Cry which we have experienced and knows it to be false.

Our first Lieutenant, he is a most cruel and Barberous man, Beating some at times untill they are not able to stand, and not allowing them the satisfaction to cry out. (*Amphitrite*)

There were captains who "seemingly delight in such work" (flogging); one who used to stand by gloating "I'll see the man's backbone, by God!" Men threw themselves off the yards into the sea rather than face the skinning they were promised if they were down last. This promise was made on board the *Hermione*, later in the year with which we

are dealing. Two men, trying to avoid the flogging, fell from the mast and broke their limbs; Captain Pigot ordered: "Throw those lubbers overboard!" That night the sailors rose and murdered their captain, with most of the other officers.

Flogging took not only the skin but the flesh from a man's back; bones showed through. A dozen strokes was by regulation the maximum, but no attention was paid to this rule; two or three dozen was usual, a hundred common. Three hundred strokes had been given. And after every stroke the blood was wiped off the thongs, so that they might not stick together and make the next blow less shattering.

It was against these conditions that the men who had fought at Cape St. Vincent protested, in single letters and then in joint petitions to the Admiralty, organizing the joint despatch of their letter to Lord Howe, carefully discussing the terms of their letters. "Messmate, if your ship's company approve of the enclosed petition, you are requested to get a fair copy . . ." wrote *The Charlottes*. "The Resolution is generous, the intention noble," answered *London*, and suggested petitioning the House of Commons as well as the Admiralty.

At the end of March, disappointed that no echo whatever came to all their pleas, the Spithead crews decided to petition the Commons. And at the same time to take some action to enforce a hearing. "We mean the day the petitions go to London to take

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charge of the ships until we get a proper answer from government." Take charge they did, and earlier than they expected, for the Admiral got wind of what was intended and the Admiralty, against his better judgment, ordered him to take the Fleet to sea. It was Easter Sunday, April 16th, a sunny day, when the order was made. It upset all the mutineers' plans for the firing of a gun, hoisting of a flag. On the spur of the moment, the crew of the *Queen Charlotte* manned the shrouds and gave three cheers. They were echoed down the Fleet. Not a ship sailed.

The men's delegates, already elected in each ship to draft the petitions and to order "this enterprise", rowed round the Fleet; it was agreed to meet on the *Charlotte*. It is probable, but by no means certain, that their leaders were Valentine Joyce of the *Royal George*, twenty-six years old, a quartermaster's mate, and Evans, an ex-lawyer disqualified for malpractices and presumably a "quota-man". Among other delegates were able seamen and petty officers, including men of some rank: a yeoman of sheets, three quartermasters.

The Delegates, then, were trustworthy seamen, not, as is usually supposed, sedition-mongers from Dublin, nor landsmen unable to adapt themselves to the service, who might be expected to dislike unfamiliar conditions; though they may have been quota men who saw how disgraceful those conditions were. Nor were they men greedy for more pay, for, as we have seen, many of them were not to be affected by the rises in pay demanded. Some were young men, perhaps too eager

for change of any kind, one or two may have been revolutionaries, but most were hardy men, no longer youthful, many of them in responsible positions, and all of them, apparently, competent. Not one of them was a mere Ordinary Seaman, only thirteen were even mere A.B.'s; five of them were seasoned Midshipmen of mature age who had worked their way up, many were of petty officer rank. This was no rabble of discontented scum, knowing nothing of the sea, but men whom their companions had learned to trust, the flower of all that was not quarter-deck.¹

These delegates first and firmly established their own discipline: no drunkenness, no letters to go privately ashore, "the greatest attention to be paid to the orders of the officers. Any person failing in respect due to them, or neglecting their duty, shall be severely punished". And this discipline they did in fact carry through triumphantly, thereby frightening opponents of a shrewd sort considerably; Lady Spencer, wife of the First Lord of the Admiralty, wrote: "The quietness of the men, tho' comfortable in some respects, yet in others is most alarming—it proves a steadiness in them to accomplish their object which overpowers *me*, whatever it may do other people." Others with more sympathy for the men, such as Lieutenant Philip Beaver of the *Monarch*, could not help admiring "the prudence and decency" of the men, their "moderation in so daring an exercise of illegal power".

The delegates next drew up their demands.

¹ *The Floating Republic*, pp. 35-6.

More wages; that provisions should be full weight and good quality; vegetables and fresh meat when in port; better conditions for the sick; the wounded to continue to receive pay. These were the general demands. In addition there were the "grievances of private ships", complaints about this or that individual officer.

During the first days of the mutiny the Admiralty woke up. The First Lord went to Portsmouth, and there drafted an offer to the men. In this offer all demands, except those for better pay, were ignored. The wounded were to get their money; able seamen to have a shilling a week more, ordinary seamen ninepence, and a new rank, "landsmen", was created on the spur of the moment, who would get only sixpence a week more. A niggardly offer, and rejected by the delegates, who made their own demands more precise: a shilling a day for able seamen (seven times the amount offered) others in proportion; none of this nonsense about "landsmen". Their other demands were repeated, and "until the grievances before stated are redressed, and an act of indemnity passed, we are determined not to lift an anchor; and the grievances of particular ships must be redressed".

This is sharper language than had been used, and the Board, after a flurry of planning "bold strokes", decided to agree to the wage demands, and those on the weight of food. But there should be "landsmen", getting a shilling less; and the

other grievances were still unanswered. It was the fifth day of the mutiny when the captains in each ship read this new offer to the crews. Some were inclined to accept; others said "wait for the *Queen Charlotte*!" (That meant "wait for the delegates' verdict".) Admiral Gardner went across to the delegates' meeting, and, as he thought, talked them over. Then came Joyce and three other delegates who had been absent ashore: they would have none of the terms. Could they trust the Admiralty? What was the talk about forgiveness? Might they not be treated like the men who mutinied recently on the *Culloden*—promised pardon and then strung up at the yardarm? Gardner, furious, changed his tune: the delegates were "a damned mutinous black-guard set . . . skulking fellows who knew the French were ready for sea, but were afraid of meeting them".¹ The delegates answered furiously and hustled him off the ship, ordered the guns to be mounted and the fleet prepared for action. The officers were kept under closer watch; a few of those most hated being sent on shore. The mutiny was showing its teeth.

During these days, and the days of waiting that followed, strict discipline was kept. A man who smuggled spirits aboard was flogged—twelve lashes. Others who committed lesser "crimes" were ducked. Nor was propaganda neglected: when they were

¹ The delegates, on the other hand, had publicly announced that if the French put to sea they would at once sail to fight them.

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attacked in the Press a reply was made, neat and pointed. And discussion went on to settle more clearly the terms they would accept. They were growing suspicious of Admiralty promises. All Admiral Gardner had done—especially by a last appeal to the “loyal” men of the fleet—was to create mistrust; he had tried to rush them. They would not be satisfied until the Admiralty’s promises became Acts of Parliament, duly passed, and the King’s Pardon duly sealed was shown them, to make victimization impossible.

A King’s Pardon was rushed out, printed and reached Portsmouth on the seventh day of the mutiny. It was read to the ships. Admiral Bridport, in command of the fleet himself read it on the flagship, the *Royal George*, and promised redress of grievances. There were cheers; the delegates met, and after seeing the original of the Pardon, were satisfied. Next morning many ships sailed the few miles to St. Helens, ready to put to sea. The mutiny seemed over.

But contrary winds held up the ships. And in London things moved slowly. The Admiralty reported to the Privy Council, the Council set up a Committee. On the 3rd May the Committee reported on the grievances and the promises of redress made—a fortnight after the mutiny began, a week after the men had resumed duty. Then when the estimates were ready the House of Commons was not sitting . . . It was only the usual official

delay, and there may have been no malice in it. But to the men windbound off St. Helens or outside Portsmouth harbour there was clearly a meaning to the delay. They chafed.

In Plymouth the crew of the squadron stationed there had mutinied just as agreement at Spithead was being patched up. The Admiralty might well have taken this as a sign to act quickly: instead they sent an order to all captains of ships to see that "the arms and ammunition belonging to the marines be constantly in good order, as well in harbour as at sea". This had not been done before, and was clear indication—with the accompanying order "on the first appearance of mutiny to use the most vigorous means to suppress it"—that the Admiralty intended to use the marines to check any further attempt to "take charge of the fleet". And in fact they were so used by Admiral Duncan in the North Sea, when men on his flagship heard of the Spithead events and showed signs of treading the same road.

The men off Spithead heard rumours of an alarming order early in May, and on the *Duke* they broke into the captain's cabin to get a copy. The captain, realizing what a dangerous document it was, had destroyed it. They seized him, and demanded a copy from the admiral, with threats of flogging or ducking or even hanging the captain if they did not get it. It was given up, and sent round the fleet.

News of this order was the spark; the fuel was the men's disgust at their "understanding of Parlia-

ment, finding there is no likelihood of redress to our former grievance" (*Queen Charlotte's* crew). From *Ramillies* they wrote of "the dilatory proceedings of Administration in not passing or even bringing in any kind of forwardness an Act of Parliament to ratify the promise made. . . . Why then, delay the passing of such an Act, and endeavour to amuse us with needless procrastinations and evasive subterfuges?" They were not amused.

Next day, Sunday May 7th, the whole fleet was again in active mutiny. Men cheered on each ship, those on the *Glory* "cheering for an Act of Parliament and an honest three pounds of pork". On the *Royal Sovereign* they seized the arms and ammunition. On the *Queen Charlotte* when the captain called out the marines they would not obey.

The ships were in two groups; one of these was commanded by Admiral Sir John Colpoys, who was feeling firm. As the boats containing delegates came rowing round the fleet, he got the men on the *London* to run in the lower-deck guns, and shut the gun-ports, so that there should be no communication with the boats. Most of the crew were then shut below hatches.

The boats came up, and delegates, warned off by the sentries, shouted to the crew. Men on the forecastle started to unlash a gun to point it at the quarter-deck where the officers stood. A lieutenant, Bover, after warning them, fired and mortally wounded one. The rest of the crew boiled up from

below, were fired on by officers, fired back. Several were wounded, three sailors fatally. The decks were red as in battle.

The fighting might have grown to a massacre, but the marines threw away their arms or went over to the side of the sailors, and Admiral Colpoys at once accepted defeat. Lieutenant Bover, who had fired the first shot, was seized and would have been lynched, but the delegates intervened. They had boarded the ship as the fighting started; one was wounded; now, when the rope was round Lieutenant Bover's neck, Valentine Joyce rushed forward, threw his arms round his neck, shouting: "If you hang this young man you shall hang me!" Admiral Colpoys, who had shown courage in acknowledging defeat, showed even more courage in bustling through the furious men to the fore-castle, where he explained that Bover was acting on his orders and he himself had only been obeying "very recent instructions" from the Admiralty. This was true, and this first bloodshed—only restrained by remarkable courage on both sides—was due wholly to the attempt at firmness of the Lords of the Admiralty. The men locked up the admiral, the captain of the ship, and Lieutenant Bover, to await court-martial; hauled down the admiral's flag; hoisted a red pennant. And throughout the fleet the delegates began to force unpopular officers to quit the ships, and also brought the whole fleet together off St. Helens.

This clash had shown that the delegates were beyond dispute masters of the fleet. Nothing was left now for the Admiralty to do but climb down. On May 8th the Government's resolution came before the House of Commons, and was rattled through to the Lords and to Royal Assent within twenty-four hours. Lord Howe, hero of a happier period of the war, was sent to Portsmouth with the King's Pardon. He went from ship to ship explaining that the Act was watertight, the Pardon absolute, until he was worn out with climbing the sides of ships and had to be lifted in and out of his boat. He then asked the delegates to meet him on the *Royal William*. There, in the end, he had to give way to the men's final demand: that the more barbarous of the officers should be dismissed their ships. Howe offered courts-martial: the men answered that these would take too long. There was nothing for it: the bitter pill had to be swallowed.

Admiral Colpoys (who was later reappointed to another squadron, but when the crews heard of it the appointment had to be cancelled), four captains, and fifty-four other officers and warrant officers left the fleet, or stayed on shore dismissed. And later in the day when a squadron of eight of the line came into Spithead, flying the red flag, Howe had to do it again. It was the squadron from Plymouth eager to join the "enterprise". They had to be argued over, persuaded of their Pardon, and they insisted on no less than sixty-five

officers and warrant officers being thrown out.

Howe played his part grandly; politely asked Joyce to drink a glass of wine with him ashore, politely inquired when the delegates would care to have the cruise round the fleet and general jollification arranged to end "the enterprise". And the only small jar that shook the fabric of next day's jubilee was when Joyce was stopped by four men in civilian clothes. They were, it was later rumoured, envoys from the ships at the Nore, where another mutiny had broken out. The rumour was true.

On board old Admiral Buckner's flagship the *Sandwich*, anchored close to the Nore lightship in the Thames estuary, Richard Parker had taken in the last weeks of March 1797, his inconspicuous place as one of the twelve hundred supernumary A.B.s that swarmed between her fetid decks. Sixteen hundred men (her war complement was seven hundred and fifty) were "crammed into a vessel rather smaller than the *Victory*". Richard Parker had scarcely served six weeks in the writhing hell of humanity that was the admiral's flagship when events singled him out from his fellows. On May 12th, while working below in the carpenter's mate's berth, he was puzzled by loud cheering from the deck above. On running up to see what this could mean he was surprised to notice that the forecastle guns were pointing aft. However, he soon went back to his work and was again surprised when he heard that the first lieutenant, an unpopular man

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named Justice, had been forced to leave the ship, that the other ships of the fleet had also turned out the officers most obnoxious to the men, that Admiral Buckner had given his flagship a wide berth and had taken up his quarters ashore, that Captain Mosse was indeed on board but was in no sense in command and that the ship was completely in the hands of her crew. The *Sandwich* was no isolated case but in the *Inflexible*, the *Repulse*, the *Director* (under that old tartar Bligh, late of the *Bounty*), *Proserpine*, *Champion* and the great majority of ships at the Great and Little Nore and in and about Sheerness, mutiny had broken out. Ships were in the charge of their crews.

Parker "considered the whole affair, with all its rash talk about hanging, was far too violent". On the second day of the mutiny he said as much to the carpenter's mate who agreed and "thought it a pity some cool level-headed person was not in charge". On the third day Parker was invited to join the ships' elected delegates at one of their meetings, on the fourth "before he knew where he was, and without his making even a gesture, he found himself, in style and function, president".¹ On May 15th Richard Parker was the leader of a movement of which four days before he had known nothing. He was not unwilling to shoulder the responsibility that had so unexpectedly been thrust upon him: he knew very intimately the wrongs

¹ *The Floating Republic*, p. 134.

and miseries of life between decks from his previous period of service. Sincerely he desired to use his every power to aid the cause of his shipmates, and passionately he worked for the mutiny, but he was neither instigator, organizer nor, ultimately, an effective leader.

Revolt at the Nore was very different from revolt at Spithead. The latter had been organized, deliberate, not in any circumstances to be flustered or deterred; the former was spontaneous, indeterminate and hysterically defiant.

Choosing a convenient moment on May 12th when the officers of the fleet were gathered on board the *Inflexible* for a court-martial, the crews of the ships at the Nore mutinied to demonstrate their solidarity with their comrades at Spithead and to emphasize that in addition to general reforms demanded for the whole service they too had their particular grievances which also demanded redress.

Off went their emissaries to carry the good news of the Nore fleet's support to the struggling crews at Spithead only to find the job had been done without their help. What then of the Nore? Were the crews to return tamely to their posts—a fresh pardon would be needed to cover their offences if they did—or could they not obtain additional concessions? The feeling for continued mutiny was strong.

Meanwhile the men hastened to enforce the now legal removal of unpopular officers from their ships.

One of the first to suffer was the notorious Captain Bligh of the *Director*. Eight years before, Bligh had been captain of the *Bounty*, a naval vessel detailed to transport bread-fruit plants from the South Sea Islands. In mid-Pacific the crew revolted against the unrestrained brutality of their captain, seized him, "the master, the gunner, the surgeon, Mr. Elphinstone, master's mate"¹ and others of the ship's company and set them adrift in the ship's launch. "The boatswain and seaman, who were to go in the boat, were allowed to collect twine, canvas, lines, sails, cordage, an eight and twenty-gallon cask of water, and Mr. Samuel got 150 lbs. of bread, with a small quantity of rum and wine, also a quadrant and compass; but he was forbidden on pain of death to touch either map, ephemeris, book of astronomical observations, sextant, time-keeper, or any of my surveys or drawings."¹ The crew were afraid of their own generosity " 'I'll be damned if he does not find his way home, if he gets anything with him', "¹ one of the men is reported to have said, and their fears were justified. Bligh succeeded in the incredible feat of seamanship of bringing his overladen open boat across the many thousand miles of treacherous water to Timor in the East Indies. But it was other men than the *Bounty's* crew that got his revengeful lashes. They made good their escape, first to Tahiti where Bligh

¹ *The Mutiny of the Bounty, in the South Seas*, by Capt. William Bligh, 1789.

had suspected "some female connections that most probably occasioned the whole transaction"¹ but, fearing pursuit, finally settled on an uninhabited island (Pitcairn Island) where "the leader of the mutineers finished his days as the most respected patriarch of an intensely puritan society."¹ Re-instated to a command on his return to England, Bligh carried his passion for disciplinary brutality a little too far and on May 19th was again forced to quit his ship. Later "his arrival as governor of the penal settlements of Australia was the signal for the outbreak of a succession of picturesque disorders".¹

On the ninth day of the mutiny at the Nore Admiral Buckner, accompanied by two captains and escorted by a procession of the delegates' boats, set out for his flagship. He took with him the new Pardon applicable in particular to the miscreants of the Nore and was full of hope that that day would see the end of the untoward condition of his command. The arrival of the procession on board the *Sandwich* was inopportune; Parker was not on board, the admiral's flag had been taken down and Buckner was received only with civilian courtesy and not the full honours due to an admiral. Moreover when President Parker returned he kept on his hat in the presence of the admiral and instead of gratefully welcoming the Royal Pardon as the solution of their differences, presented an ultimatum and,

¹ Charles Vidil: *Les Mutineries de la Marine Allemande*, p. 20.

with the other delegates, declared that "they would not resign the charge they now had in their own hands till the conditions therein stipulated for were complied with and satisfied by the personal attendance of the Board of their Lordships"¹ at Sheerness. Buckner, very much on his dignity at what he considered an unbearably insolent reception, returned to the shore promising to forward the conditions to the Admiralty.

The demands of the fleet were eight. First, that every indulgence granted at Portsmouth should apply at the Nore. Second that leave should be granted to every man in rotation when in port. Third, that arrears of pay were to be made up to six months back. Fourth that no expelled officer might be reinstated in the ship from which he had been expelled. Fifth, that pressed men were to receive an advance in pay to buy necessities. Sixth, "that an indemnification be made any men who run, and may now be in his Majesty's naval service, and that they shall not be liable to be taken up as deserters". Seventh, a more equal distribution of prize money and eighth, that the Articles of War should be modified so that the "terror and prejudice against his Majesty's service" might be taken off.

In effect all, except the 4th and the 6th, of these demands were a mere underlining of the demands

¹ Earl of Camperdown *Life of Admiral Duncan*, p. 113; quoted on p. 141 of *The Floating Republic*.

of Spithead and might have been met without loss of prestige. But the Admiralty, like their representative on the spot, were on their dignity; their answer was a point blank refusal to every demand except the first. They had had enough of conciliation and on May 22nd two regiments of militia marched, under Admiralty orders, into Sheerness.

Meanwhile all was not entirely well within the mutinous fleet. Discipline was strict; every ship was governed by a junta of twelve and a captain elected from it, the regulation twelve lashes were inflicted for offences—usually drunkenness—and the fleet was as well conducted as regards routine work as in normal times. But the delegates were by no means certain of the unanimity of their support. Everywhere there was tremendous show.

Some of the Delegates of the Fleet . . . went on board the different ships and harangued the ships' companies; and then joining their companions they went with their boats in formidable procession to Sheerness with a Band of Music playing "God Save the King", "Rule, Britannia" and "Britons strike home". On these occasions Parker's boat took the lead, with the others on each quarter. They then landed, and assembling in great numbers, paraded the streets (all of them being armed with pistols and cutlasses) with a Red Flag at the head of the procession: this practice they continued every day, as long as they were permitted to land. In other respects their demeanour was at this time peaceable. All the Ships had now the yard ropes roved, and the Red Ensigns hoisted.

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In addition every man possible was bound by an oath sworn in private before the delegates to be "true to the cause we are embarked on and to the delegates . . . whilst they continue to support the present cause". But yet there were some ships of the fleet still under their captain's orders whose participation in the mutiny was coerced rather than voluntary.

On May 23rd the Admiralty's refusal of the eight articles was received and the free Pardon again offered to those willing to return to duty. The delegates reaffirmed their determination to stand by their demands and indignantly refused the offer of pardon, but "when it was read on board the *San Fiorenzo* and *Clyde* by their respective captains, the red flag was immediately hauled down and the white colours hoisted with three cheers. The crews of other ships (*Iris*, *Brilliant*, *Grampus*, *Espion* and *Niger*) appeared to be contending for the mastery, as the red flag was seen to disappear and the white to supersede, until at last the red flag was hoisted and remained."¹ The rest of the fleet would not even allow the reading of the Pardon.

The reply of the fleet to the threat of the soldiers in Sheerness was immediate fraternization, "sweeping over the parade-ground when they were at their exercises, and in the very teeth of them along the

¹ *Account of the Mutiny at the Nore*, by Rear-Admiral Charles Cunningham (Captain of the *Clyde* during the mutiny).

ranks, shaking hands with their relations and friends amongst the militia".¹

Gunboats lying in Sheerness harbour were seized and the ships scattered about the Little Nore and Sheerness, were concentrated in a double crescent at the Great Nore; the threat of the *Inflexible's* guns being needed to induce the removal of the *Clyde* to her new moorings.

Then on the 28th (the seventeenth day of the mutiny) three members of the Board of Admiralty left London for Sheerness and the hope of successful negotiation reopened. Parker especially was confident that a conference, as man to man, would undoubtedly bring about understanding and conciliation.

But no conference took place. On presenting themselves at their Lordships' lodging the delegates encountered the inevitable Buckner, the official ear-trumpet. Backwards and forwards he went from their unapproachable Lordships to the encroaching delegates crowding round the door. Eventually the delegates declared themselves willing to negotiate on the promise that the Spithead terms would be ratified for them and their other points considered. Lord Spencer would tolerate nothing short of complete submission; the Pardon was there, they could take it or. . . . The delegates, snubbed and disappointed, went back to their ships. Later a solitary man returned to make one more

¹ *The Floating Republic*, p. 150.

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effort for personal contact with the Lords of the Admiralty but he was refused admission; he was Richard Parker.

This apparently abortive visit to Sheerness was in fact by no means wasted for, from what they had seen and from information they had received, the Admiralty now felt confident that there would be no need for them to descend to bargaining; a firm hand and patience would soon see the crumbling of the mutiny. Meanwhile authority began to marshal its forces. General Sir Charles Grey was left with full military powers to do what seemed necessary for the defence of Sheerness and the subjugation of the mutinous fleet; Admiral Duncan at Yarmouth was asked if it would be possible to send ships from the North Sea Fleet to quell the mutiny; and an order was sent to the naval victuallers at Chatham that no further stores were to be delivered to the mutinous ships. The last of these three steps was to prove the ultimate undoing of the mutiny. Grey at Sheerness made himself very busy about defence against an attack that was never contemplated; Duncan was uncertain of what might result but if ordered to do so would endeavour to bring his fleet to the Nore; and the naval victuallers did as they were told.

Meanwhile on board the *Clyde* and the *San Fiorenzo* (ships under their captains' orders though sending delegates to the mutineers' council) defection was afoot. Shortly after midnight the *Clyde*—

she lay on the extreme edge of the crescent but still under the guns of the bigger ships—quietly cut her cable and drifted on the flood tide towards Sheerness. It was not until a foresail was bent that the *Clyde* was observed, but even then the ships at anchor were unable to bring their guns to bear and she was able to make the harbour mouth and to anchor in the Medway. Later on in the same day the *San Fiorenzo* also cut her cable but was unable to head for Sheerness and had instead to make for the open sea, running meanwhile the gauntlet of the guns of the anchored ships.

Their comrades were deserting them, there were no signs of support from Spithead or the North Sea, their food had been cut off; thus were the hopes of success of the mutiny gravely menaced. It seemed as if there was nothing for it but to give way when, almost before the *San Fiorenzo* had disappeared in the direction of the Channel, three ships of the line each flying the red flag were seen bearing up-river towards the mutinous ships. They were ships from Duncan's North Sea squadron most timely arrived in support of their comrades.

At Yarmouth Admiral Duncan and the North Sea Fleet had been lying under orders to sail, should the wind turn easterly, for the mouth of the Texel there to engage the enemy who would no doubt take advantage of such a wind to emerge from their river anchorage. The pay of the fleet was in arrears—over a year's wages was owing to most of the men

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—and conditions were as bad here as anywhere else in the navy. In several ships there had been sporadic outbreaks but Admiral Duncan had succeeded in subduing them by demonstrating his great courage and imposing a sort of personal loyalty upon the would-be mutinous men. By the 26th of May, however, Duncan became increasingly nervous about his command, and hearing that delegates had been despatched from the Nore, he decided to put to sea regardless of the wind, at the same time making arrangements to intercept the boat with the delegates aboard.

The order to get under way was obeyed by all the ships except the *Nassau*, which Duncan had deliberately left behind, and the *Montague* which broke into open mutiny. The next day the fleet, anchored four leagues from land, was decreased by the *Belliqueux*, the *Lion* and the *Standard* who returned in mutiny to Yarmouth. By the 29th when the wind turned definitely east, all the ships that sailed to watch the enemy were two of the line and two frigates; with this infinitesimal fleet Duncan stood off the mouth of the Texel and successfully bluffed the combined French and Dutch by signals to an imaginary fleet in the offing.

The mutinous ships at Yarmouth, after a futile interview with a would-be conciliatory emissary from the Admiralty, decided to join their comrades at the Nore and the first days of June saw the mutinous forces united.

This reinforcement of the mutiny led to a vital decision on the part of the delegates. The food supply of the Nore fleet had been stopped; in retaliation it was determined that the fleet should utilize its position to blockade the shipping in the Thames. It was thought that this threat, not only to the Admiralty but to the nation as a whole, would produce a recognition of their rights to confer on terms other than those of complete submission; in fact it brought no recognition of any rights at all. The middle and trading classes, somewhat alarmed at the lurid tales emanating from Sheerness, now became thoroughly scared. A bill was passed in Parliament making incitement to mutiny an offence punishable by death, another bill was introduced outlawing rebellious ships and seamen, Sheerness was fortified, £100 reward was offered for the capture of the instigator of the revolt and the more virile members of the middle classes flocked to Tilbury to volunteer to serve aboard the ships being manned in Long Reach to attack the rebel force.

Thus the mutiny, a strike against intolerable conditions, was coloured, by those who knew nothing or cared nothing about the faults of a wooden administration, as a rebellion of the first order. Yet upon Restoration day every ship at the Nore had flown the Royal Standard as well as "the flag of defiance" and paid the usual tribute of a royal salute. Indeed the very blockade that caused such

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widespread offence was partly occasioned by a desire to force an early settlement as the Dutch were said to be at sea.

By June 7th, as affairs were no nearer a solution and in spite of the impounding of an occasional store ship and raids to the Isles of Sheppey and Grain in search of cattle, the men were short of food and water. It was decided to petition the King. Lord Northesk, captain of the *Monmouth*, popular and to some extent in sympathy with the men, was asked to carry to London a petition which appealed to the King over the heads of his ministers. Though Northesk faithfully did his part, needless to say the petition bore no fruit and the delegates were again faced with an impasse that daily became more uncomfortable; "It was either surrender, which at that stage would mean the death penalty, or escape." But there were innumerable objections to escaping. Where could they go? France, Bantry Bay, the West Indies, Cromarty Bay, the Shannon. . . ? There were many reasons against each and although more than twenty masters of vessels interned in the Thames had been taken aboard the *Sandwich* to act as pilots should occasion arise, it was very doubtful whether the men were prepared to face a long sea voyage without the officers to navigate. Anyway the *Sandwich* was unseaworthy and would have to be abandoned. The talk of escape reached London and frightened authority into ordering the removal of all buoys and beacons from the estuary—

a proceeding which made the river quite unnavigable for a fortnight and ran up a bill of £1260 os. 3d.¹

On the 8th of June the rejection of the petition was received together with a proclamation declaring the mutineers to be rebels. The delegates made strenuous efforts to use this unjust decree to bind the men to stubborn resistance but the tightness of their position was now quite apparent to them all and opinions began to differ strongly over the wisdom of the course of action advised by the delegates. Only a very few of the more fiery spirits actually wanted to run away from England and their homes, yet if they wanted to save their necks, had they better not surrender now while authority still left a loophole for the pardoning of those who were not ringleaders? Everywhere there was argument, uncertainty, doubt.

On the afternoon of the 9th the lieutenant in charge of the *Leopard* carried out a successful coup, recaptured the vessel from the mutineers, cut her cable, bent the foresail and in a very short time was slipping away up stream. "Almost immediately the rest of the fleet was alive to what was going on, and with hardly an interval the *Repulse* followed the example of the *Leopard*." But the *Repulse* did not get away so neatly. She ran aground and soon the guns of, first, the *Director*, then the *Montague* and then the rest of the fleet were pounding at her. There was comparatively little damage; the rigging a good

¹ *The Floating Republic*, p. 211.

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deal torn about, but the hull not seriously damaged and only one casualty. The gunners aimed high.

On the 10th Captain Knight was sent to London with a further urgent appeal but the answer came back next day: "complete submission". The position was beyond hope and on the 12th the delegates ceased to try for united action and the fleet was informed that each ship should act for itself. That night the *Standard* gave the lead and after her came *Agamemnon*, *Nassau*, *Vestal* and *Isis* all heading up river and surrendering at Gravesend. "The *Montague*, *Lion* and *Director* were expected to follow." The mutiny had failed.

On board the *Standard* the principal delegate committed suicide, other delegates and mutineers made good their escape to Holland and France but on the *Sandwich*, when at last she came to anchor in Sheerness harbour and Buckner's flag broke at the fore, Richard Parker, supposed black-hearted villain, offering no resistance, walked quietly to the boat that was to take him to prison.

In the fore part of the boat the militiamen sat with their loaded muskets held upright in their hands, and faced the stern in which sat or rather lay, the now degraded president. . . . Behind him was the coxswain with his knees upon the prisoner's shoulders . . . while, seated, a lieutenant of the flagship held a drawn sword above his head. These precautions were unnecessary; the man was bound and unarmed, and had no hope, no intention of evading his fate.

On June 30th after begging that he should be the only one to suffer, Parker met his end bravely at the yardarm of the *Sandwich*. Of his fellow mutineers twenty-nine were executed, nine flogged (with forty to, in one case, three hundred and eighty lashes) and twenty-nine condemned to terms of imprisonment varying from one to eight years.

The influences of these two great mutinies at Spithead and the Nore were felt throughout the service and had their repercussions even in the Mediterranean Fleet, under Admiral Jervis.

Jervis's fleet was a victorious one and was constantly in action keeping a close blockade upon the ships that since the victory of Cape St. Vincent had been cooped up in Cadiz Bay. Moreover its commander was no ordinary admiral. At the time of the great mutinies at home, Jervis (now Lord St. Vincent) had seen the best part of fifty years afloat. He was a hard man (as his captains and rear-admirals learnt to their cost) but a superb sailor who knew the value of healthy, well-trained men and though he drove them hard—keeping his ships at sea as much as possible—he paid personal attention to the food and quarters of the crews under his command and conducted a relatively successful battle against scurvy—the scourge of the navy of that day.

The first signs of mutiny, in the summer of 1795, were instantly suppressed by the execution of mutineers and the splitting up of mutinous crews.

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On the *St. George*, the *Alcmene* and the *Emerald* men were hanged, and when it seemed doubtful as to how a double execution might be received on board the *Defense*, Jervis armed the sloops of the squadron and, under a rear-admiral, ordered them to encircle the *Defense*, cover her with their guns and fire into her should the executions not proceed according to schedule. The threat told and the men were hanged.

In 1798 the *Marlborough*, a ship that had taken part in the Spithead mutiny was sent, with several others, to join the Mediterranean Fleet. The ship had been in a state of mutiny throughout the passage from England and as soon as she had dropped anchor off Cadiz she sent to the Admiral demanding a court-martial. A council of war was called and one of the principal mutineers at once condemned to be hanged; on the very next day and by his own shipmates. The captain of the *Marlborough* went hurriedly to the admiral to warn him that his men were not likely to carry out such an order, but Jervis gave him scant sympathy, telling him that if the order were not carried out he, Jervis, would see to it that the captain was relieved of his command. Next day, as in the previous case, the *Marlborough* was surrounded by armed sloops. Power was in the hands of authority and under the threat of loaded cannon the execution was carried out.

Victory at Spithead, defeat at the Nore—but the

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revolt of the men was bigger than its defeats or victories: within a few years conditions that had been unchanged for centuries were rapidly improved.

CHAPTER FOUR

EMPIRE AND FREEDOM



INDIA is still, after a century and a half of British rule, a strange land to those who live in Britain. To understand a country and people different in background from our own and overwhelming in size and numbers is difficult enough in any case; the relationship of rulers and ruled adds another and greater difficulty. When force is used by one nation to conquer and hold another, truth is among the casualties. India is unknown to us partly because we do not let India speak to us, partly because we have invented a school-book history of India that is seldom within six thousand miles of the reality; India is "the unchanging East", the "brightest jewel in the British Crown", the land where we, the Sahibs, impose peace, order, good government on treacherous and bloodthirsty "natives". And if proof is needed of the black-hearted brutality of the ungoverned Indian—so say those who teach children in our schools, and others in our journals—look at the massacres, the horrors, of the Indian Mutiny.

The truth is on the other side of the medal.

Truth is possible between equals, and sometimes even necessary: it is useless and perhaps unsafe to write now of Australia as peopled by undisciplined descendants of transported felons; nor is it any use now, or comforting even to Bournemouth Colonels, to accuse the Americans of atrocities during their War of Independence. If the British had failed to hold India during 1857, or had lost their grip at some later date, the story would have been told differently; some Indian historian of a free India would have written a chapter on the Mutiny in which it would take its proper place among other events. And he would write of it not as "the Mutiny" but as the "First Indian War of Independence".

The following account of the events of 1857 in India is written without the help of Indian historians; the rare pamphlet published in Paris has not come our way, or the Mahratti history that passes from hand to hand in India. Only English and American sources have been available; and most of the material is from standard English works written soon after the Mutiny. Yet the story is very different from that which the English reader may expect; and because of this a warning and an encouragement to imagination is necessary. The warning is: do not believe that this account is biased, or the facts given are selected from only one side of the picture, simply because it is different from the ideas of the Indian Mutiny that have come to you from schoolteacher, journalist, novelist. And think of Europe four hun-

dred years ago: the scrambling princes, arrogant lords, endemic war, plague, ignorance, serfdom. If Indians or Chinese had conquered Europe towards the end of the Middle Ages, and held Europe under the peace of a single Empire, how many wars would have been prevented, how proudly these foreign rulers from far-off could have believed that they were giving peace, order, government to unruly, twisting, incapable, pallid children! Europe would have had peace, of a sort, order and government—with serfdom stabilized in the form of “cottar” tenure, with debauched spaniel-princes kept on immensely costly thrones, with no liberty to say or print. If in such circumstances European soldiers had mutinied against their new strange masters, would we think mainly in terms of atrocity and massacre? Would we not see in this mutiny a step in the growth of the nations of Europe towards independence and nationality?

That growth was in process in India when the English came there. It was in process, in the way that the growth of nations came about in Europe, by the break-up of the old feudal order, by war and raiding, trade and the gathering of wealth. The immense feudal empire of the Great Moghul had been broken by his own viceroys. The Mahratta raiders had broken the viceroys. Afghans, Persian invaders, Sikhs, a score of other races and tribes fought and shifted; new principalities arose; the country was divided not only between Moslem and

Hindu but between clan and clan, caste and caste—and the slow process of welding clans into peoples, castes into classes, a process needing centuries in Europe, was beginning, but only just beginning, when the English came.

There was war in this India, but it was usually war like that of the Renaissance in Europe—tiny armies, desultory campaigns, sometimes a Prince's sport, sometimes a city sacked. Into this India the British brought not peace, in the years before 1857, but war more deliberate, more scientific, more "total" and continual than the Indians had known. Discipline and muskets changed the nature of war, made it greater and more terrible. With Indian troops, across Indian fields, the English fought the Dutch and the French; and then Indian state after state went down before them. And whatever they conquered they held.

This decaying feudal society, crumbling rotten at the top but retaining still in its self-sufficing village communities a peaceful and not necessarily unhappy basis for the life of millions, was marshalled into a semblance of superficial order by the Englishmen, urged on by the forces of the strongest capitalism in Western Europe. And in that new order the feudal tyranny, expropriated by the English or left in the hands of princes new or old, weighed far more heavily on the people than before, land-tax or rent now arbitrarily fixed, customary tenure reduced to rigid legal ownership. And

throughout India the peasant found not only the old burden, the prince, more weighty, but found also a new burden, Money.

The British system hastened what was probably an inevitable change. . . . The ryot found himself in the position of the small peasant in nearly every part of the world. He was forced to dispose of part of his produce to meet a cash demand. . . . He had to think of wealth in terms of money instead of as cattle or grain. . . .¹

Undoubtedly this change was inevitable but it was not inevitable that it should be hustled through under the orders and for the profit of foreigners. Hardship, suffering, discontent followed. "All India is at all times looking out for our downfall. The people everywhere would rejoice, or fancy they would rejoice, at our destruction. And numbers are not wanting who would promote it by all means in their power."²

During the years immediately preceding the revolt of 1857, the amount of land and revenue under the control of the British East India Company was considerably increased. Lord Dalhousie, who became Governor General in 1848, carried out his instructions to "persevere in the . . . course of abandoning no just and honourable accession of territory or revenue" with enthusiasm and efficiency.

¹ *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*. E. Thompson and G. T. Garratt, p. 428.

² Metcalfe, *Papers and Correspondence*, p. 116, quoted by J. L. Morison in *Lawrence of Lucknow*, p. 55.

Many of the native governed states of India were the creation of the Company. These States were ruled by native princes who had agreed to defer to the "advice" of the British Resident on matters of external policy. These rulers were nothing more than puppet princelings dependent upon the Company for their kingdoms, which might be forfeit for maladministration or any other reason the Company might find. Under the policy of Dalhousie plenty of reasons were forthcoming, the most productive of which, from the Company's point of view, was the disallowance of the right to adopt an heir. This custom of adoption was of old standing, and persists in most feudal societies of this type (as in Abyssinia until this year) where strong personal rulers are necessary; the first-born son is sometimes a weakling—child of immature parents—sometimes an ambitious young upstart scheming to take his father's power; he is replaced by an adopted son whose qualities and family connections help to stabilize the throne. Or often there is no son; rulers soaked in extravagant luxury find it difficult to produce legitimate male heirs.¹

Adoption was as usual in India as direct inheritance in Europe. But the Company ruled that principalities for which there were no direct heirs were forfeit—to the Company.

¹ There would be less American blood in the British peerage to-day if America's millionaires had not found this difficulty; their money goes to a relative or an only child, and when the latter is a girl the aristocracy of Europe baits its hooks.

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Under this rule a number of States were gathered in, one after another, till Indian opinion thought the foreigner looked on sovereignty as a tree whose fruits must all ultimately fall to his basket.¹

In 1848 the State of Satara, created in the early nineteenth century in what afterwards proved to be a geographically inconvenient spot, was annexed by the Company, and the ruling family, an ancient one much revered by Hindus and Marathas, was dethroned. A member of the Governor General's council remarks: "the confidence of our Native Allies was a good deal shaken by the annexation of Satara. . . ."² The States of Jhansi and Nagpur were annexed in 1854. The elderly and debauched ruler of Nagpur died without an heir, the succession was declared to have lapsed and the State acquired by the Company.

These States were small and scattered, but to the north, in the middle of the most fertile part of India, lay a State "larger than Switzerland, Saxony and Wurtemberg together" that had long been a thorn in the British side: the State of Oudh. A debauched, degenerate succession of princes, placed in power by the British, their country policed by British mercenaries (for which service the State of Oudh paid the "government in Leadenhall Street" more than adequately), misruled the State for more than

¹ *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 397.

² Minute of Colonel Low. Feb. 10th, 1854, quoted in *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 401.

fifty years. "Under the ægis of British protection, Lucknow (the capital of Oudh) was infested for close on a century with pimps and panders, musicians, robbers and Europeans."¹ The country districts were ravaged by the marauding followers of landholders and collectors who extorted money and land from their weaker neighbours by every known method of savagery. After paternal reprimands extending over fifty years, the British Government at last, in 1856, intervened. The Nawab-Wazir was dethroned, the State annexed and the administration taken over by the British, with the stipulation that after the expenses of administration had been paid the surplus revenue of the State was to be paid to the Company. This the Company proclaimed was destruction of a corrupt Government in the interests of humanity.

Over two thirds of India in 1856 was under British rule; the other third remained under its native princes. Perhaps British rule was less tyrannical than that of feudal princes, but it was a white man's rule and there "Indians . . . were debarred from hope of any post, civil or military, of any importance".²

To these nuclei of discontent formed by the royal dispossessed, were added the other princes whose lands had vanished years before, whose pensions were later discontinued. The Peshwa of Poona, a

¹ *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 406.

² *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 410.

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Maratha ruler, beaten in war by the British, had been handsomely pensioned off by the Government, who believed that he could not live long to be a burden upon the Company. At his death the pension was discontinued, to the exclusion of his adopted son the Nana Sahib.

The Nana Sahib's revenge upon the white man came in 1857.

In 1855 the Nawab of the Carnatic died and the title was discontinued; "the rajas of Tanjore died out, as their power had died long ago."

Expropriated rulers were not the only Indians to suffer from British rule. Everywhere thousands of their retainers were thrown out of employment. "Those that had sung and revelled starved . . . Oudh was flooded with disbanded troops, under a new regime in which robbery was liable to heavy penalties."¹ And, most significant of all, 40,000 Company's sepoy²s had their homes in Oudh and "they and their families, a large fraction of the total population, were troubled in their minds".³

It may be doubted whether Oudh after February 1856 was ever really tranquil. . . .⁴

As for Oudh, apart altogether from the sipahis, Sir Henry (Lawrence) thought that, whether in Lucknow

¹ *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 410.

² "Sepoy", a corruption of "Sipahi", meaning soldier; the French corruption is "spahi" and means the same thing. The French retained the name for native regiments: they had no Mutiny.

³ *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*.

⁴ *Lawrence of Lucknow*, p. 288.

or over the countryside, hunger, poverty, and discontent were prevalent enough to breed any sort of trouble.¹

Against this discontent, and the hunger and poverty that caused it, the English had to rely on their few thousands of white troops, their discipline, their prestige.

In 1830 the British population in India amounted to rather over 40,000.² In 1872, when the first census was taken, the native population was shown to be 206,162,360.³ Allowing for the changes occurring between these dates and 1857, the proportion of white men to natives in that year was probably something in the neighbourhood of one to four thousand. Out of the 40,000 British in India "the great bulk was military. Taking all the military services, H.M.'s regiments and the British element in the native army, there were over 37,000 of whom about 6000 were officers of one kind or another. These constituted about one sixth of the whole Indian Army."²

That the English ruled India by military force is very evident. "Our real strength", wrote Metcalfe, "consists in the few European regiments, speaking comparatively, that are scattered singly over the vast space of subjugated India." But these European regiments were outnumbered five to one

¹ *Lawrence of Lucknow*, p. 299.

² Figures based on Minutes of Evidence, Vol. V, Appendix A. Quoted in *Lawrence of Lucknow*.

³ *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 422.

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by the native forces of the Company's army, officered by Englishmen trained at home.

That there was danger in the Company's system, military and political, of limiting native opportunity and confining sepoys to subordinate positions, was seen by a few of the more enlightened contemporary observers. On the 2nd May, 1857, eight days before the mutiny broke out, Sir Henry Lawrence wrote to Lord Canning the Governor General:

We measure too much by English rules, and expect, contrary to all experience that the energetic and aspiring among *immense* military masses should like our dead level and our arrogation to ourselves even when we are notorious imbeciles, of *all* authority and *all* emolument. These sentiments of mine, freely expressed during the last fifteen years, have done me injury, but I am not less convinced of their soundness and that until we treat natives and especially native soldiers, as having much the same feelings, the same ambition, the same perception of ability and imbecility, we shall never be safe.¹

And they weren't safe. All India was "troubled in its mind". People everywhere were looking for the destruction of the British. From the ghost of the Great Moghul, "shrivelled into a pensioner and a pageant" whose heir had promised to vacate the palace at Delhi as it was wanted for military purposes, through the hereditary rulers with no one to rule, the landowners uncertain of their tenure,

¹ Quoted by Edward Thompson in *The Reconstruction of India*, pp. 22-3.

the traders nervous for their trade, to the sepoy afraid for his caste and his standing, with no hope of advancement; all were "troubled in their minds". And none doubted the author of their trouble. Of these the sepoy alone had power; he was armed.

At Vellur in Southern India in 1806, fifty years before the great mutiny, sepoys of the garrison rose, slew their officers and any white men they could, and raised the standard of the Sultan of Maisur, lately overthrown by the British. New regulations had much infringed on the sepoy's caste and religion.

At last the sepoy, forbidden to wear the distinguishing marks of caste on his forehead, stripped of his earrings, to which, by ties alike of vanity and superstition, he was fondly attached, and ordered to shave himself according to a regulation cut, was put into a stiff round hat, like a Pariah drummer's, with a flat top, a leather cockade and a standing feather. It was no longer called a "turban", it was a hat or cap; in the language of the natives, a "topi"; and a topi-wallah, or hat wearer, was in their phraseology a synonym for a Faringhi or Christian.¹

He had nursed his grievances of lack of opportunity and insufficient pay; the deposed Sultan made much of the discontent in the native army in order to turn a sepoy mutiny to his own account. From the Sultan's point of view the mutiny failed—Vellur was recaptured by a column of European troops with galloper guns who appeared very

¹ Kaye and Malleeson, *History of the Indian Mutiny*, p. 158, Vol. I.

promptly on the scene—but the Government decree that “all orders which might be liable to the objection of affecting the usages of the troops” should be abandoned, benefited such of the native troops as survived the massacre attendant on the recapture of the town by the British.

Barrackpur in 1824, during the Burmese war, was the scene of a native mutiny that was suppressed with almost incredible barbarity. Disputes over the question of campaigning allowances had been going on for some time. The Government declared that each sepoy should be responsible for the transport of his own goods without any increase being made in his allowances. The sepoys were high caste men, but their pay was, at the best of times, bad, “coolies, carters, carriers, drivers, were offered higher pay than the infantry to induce them to enlist for a service which was dreaded; sepoys were told they must continue at the lower rates for which they had contracted.”

The 47th regiment of Native Infantry refused to march unless they were guaranteed increased allowances. Confronted by two European regiments, a battery of European artillery and a troop of the Governor General's bodyguard, they were told they must consent to march or to ground their arms. Again they refused to obey the word. This time an order was given; the artillery opened fire with grape and the parade ground was reduced to a shambles. The muskets with which the ground was

strewn by men fleeing for their lives, were found to be unloaded; armed insurrection had not even been contemplated.

Then the formalities of the military law were called in to aid the stern decisions of the grape-shot. Some of the leading mutineers were convicted and hanged; and the regiment was struck out of the Army list. But this display of vigour, though it checked mutiny for the time, tended only to sow broadcast the seeds of future insubordination.¹

During the Afghan war of 1843-4, numerous native regiments, cavalry as well as infantry, mutinied; all on the question of allowances. Troops were wanted to police the province of Sindh, a district beyond the Indus bordering on remote Baluchistan. It was a tradition in the Company's army that service beyond the Indus was rewarded by extra money. Many regiments who had started on the long march believing this money would be theirs, mutinied on learning that it was not to be paid. The 34th from Bengal refused service in Sindh without extra allowances. The 7th Bengal Cavalry, Native Artillery, the 67th, the 4th, the 64th, the 6th Madras Cavalry, the 47th; all followed the lead of the 34th. With every regiment it was the question of allowances and in some cases it is said that regiments were induced to start by promises of increased "Indus money" which were

¹ Kaye and Malleon, *History of the Indian Mutiny*, Vol. I.

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not fulfilled.¹ Sir John Kaye relates that the 47th, a regiment from Madras, were paid in advance at the increased rate but that upon their arrival at Bombay were forced to refund a proportion of their money. It is hardly surprising that this led to their mutiny. The Indian Government seems to have been more impressed with the magnitude of the crime of organized disobedience than with the very legitimate grievances of their soldiers. Also it had been reported that one regiment of the regular English army had "openly declared that it would not act against the sepoys who were demanding no more than their rights."² In these circumstances disciplinary measures might have been difficult, and it was inconvenient, to say the least of it, to disband so large a body of troops as the mutineers represented. So the situation was glossed over by the "disbandment of one regiment, the punishment of a few ringleaders in others, and the forgiveness of the rest"; a "treatment . . . that was nothing more than a series of expedients . . . but one which may be recorded without censure", says the kind-hearted Kaye.

The great revolt which took place in 1857 was more than a mutiny; it was a war; in many respects very like the other wars that had been fought between British and "natives". But with this difference: for a considerable time the final issue was

¹ Kaye and Malleeson, *History of the Indian Mutiny*, p. 215, Vol. I.

² Kaye and Malleeson, *History of the Indian Mutiny*, Vol. I.

seriously in doubt. "For four months during the summer of 1857 it seemed that the Mutiny might develop into a real war of independence, which would make re-conquest impossible".¹ It was a war, and India knew England's methods of colonial warfare.

Colonial wars . . . are invariably conducted with considerable savagery. . . . Non-combatants, including women and children are ill-treated and occasionally murdered, their houses and villages are burnt. Prisoners are executed, and sometimes mutilated; or are tortured either by prolonging the agony of their death or by some act the religious significance of which might endanger their future immortality.

Such disregard of the elementary rules of civilized warfare characterized nearly every campaign fought by European Powers outside Europe.²

The revolt then developed into war, it began with mutiny; a clash that occurred immediately before the outbreak helped very largely to precipitate this. This clash was one of cultures and religions but, vital though it was, it cannot be called—as it frequently is in school text-books—the "cause" of the mutiny.

In the past the antagonism between Christian and Hindu or Mohammedan culture had played its part in the revolts of the sepoy against his Christian

¹ *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, Thompson and Garratt, p. 438.

² *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 439; see also *My Diary in India*, Russell, II, 43.

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master. At Vellur the leather cockade and the round hat, details to the Christian mind, were insufferable offences to the Hindu and Mussulman alike. The transport disputes of the Burmese war meant that high caste sepoys were to be degraded by the use of cooking utensils common also to others—a universal practice amongst Christians.¹ The revolt of 1857 was preceded by such a sequence of high-handed attacks upon Eastern tenets of caste, custom and religion as was guaranteed to produce a state of great emotional tension amongst those who suffered from them. That these attacks were made more in the spirit of ignorance than of offence or proselitization, is beyond a doubt, but this fact did not lessen their effect.

In August 1856—nine months before the outbreak of the mutiny—in spite of (or perhaps because of) the fact that an order that they were to proceed *by sea* to Burma had produced a mutiny in a regiment that declared itself perfectly willing to go anywhere by land, a general order was issued that all native troops should serve overseas if required. This was a blow to the high caste Bengali sepoy, for it meant that not only might he be transported by sea (and to cross “black water”, salt water, reduced him to the same caste as the Lascars of the ships) to fight wars for the English in Burma, Persia or even Europe, but that fewer and fewer men of his own

¹ The usage of caste compelled each man to take his own cooking utensils wherever he went.

standing would enlist in the Company's service and continual association with lower caste men would prejudice his standing and religion. Evidently the English had no further use for the services of the high caste Hindu: they preferred Sikhs, Gurkhas—or Christians.

In January of 1857 a great improvement in the arms supplied to the Indian Army was effected. The old infantry musket was abandoned as an anachronism and a new firearm "with grooved bores after the fashion of a rifle" was issued. The range of the new gun was considerably greater than that of the old musket and the sepoy, who took a pride in his soldiering, was delighted. But, and it was a big but, it was soon found that the new rifle could not be used without lubrication, and cartridges arrived from England thick with grease.

Immediately word went round the regiments that the Faringhi was using the new cartridges as an insidious attack upon caste. The new cartridges—the ends of which had to be bitten off before loading—were greased with animal fat, "the fat of the detested swine of the Muhammadan or the venerated cow of the Hindu".¹ There was a tremendously strong feeling throughout the native army, and with cause, for admittedly the first cartridges sent out for instructional purposes were covered with lard. The mistake was recognized and mutton fat substituted, but explanations were long and delayed.

¹ Kaye and Malleeson, *History of the Indian Mutiny*, p. 359.

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Anson, the Commander-in-Chief wrote to Canning: "I am not surprised at their objections to the cartridges having seen them. I had no idea they contained, or rather were smeared with, such a quantity of grease which looks exactly like fat."¹

It is a popular belief among certain sections of the British public that the Bengali sepoy was a childlike creature easily frightened by bogeys, and the reaction to the greased cartridges is cited to illustrate this. But these were not bogeys he was frightened of; they were realities. Little by little he and his country were being devoured. In the past he had tried, on various occasions, to hold up the voracious advance of the English, and had been unsuccessful; this time he would resist the threat to his Indian customs, outlook, religion, if he died for it. With him ranged the despoiled princes and their impoverished retainers: these offered a hope—when the sepoys rose the Moghul Raj would be restored and the land rid of the English for ever. Thus the mutiny was led and controlled—as far as there was any leadership, any control—by a worn-out feudal remnant of Indian society, nobles who knew nothing of nobility, princes who only knew how to be brutal. In some areas, as we shall tell, it became a peasant revolt against the great landlords and usurers who bought bankrupts' land; this peasant revolt, that might

¹ Quoted by Thompson and Garratt in *The Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 446.

have sent India swinging towards the destruction of feudalism, towards "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity", towards a middle-class republic, found the middle class of the towns weak or non-existent, and failed quickly. In most parts of India the movement was coloured by the Dark Ages, and because of this spiritless, undecided, inchoate.

Up and down the country rode the agents of the ex-King of Oudh, the Rani of Jhansi, Nana Sahib and Khan Bahaddur Khan. Everywhere they carried news of the polluted cartridges (elaborated sometimes with a story of powdered bones mixed with ration corn) and of the devastating attack of the Christian upon the only remaining property of the Indian, his religion. The following is a quotation from a proclamation issued "from the Painted Garden of the Peshwa" in Cawnpore, by Dundu Pant, the Nana Sahib, after the proclamation of the resumption of his royal authority, dated the 6th July, 1857:

A traveller just arrived at Cawnpore from Calcutta, had heard that, previous to the distribution of the cartridges a council had been held for the purpose of depriving the Hindustanis of their faith and religion. . . . This resolution was sent to Queen Victoria, and received her approval. . . . The Sahibs of Calcutta ordered the distribution of the cartridges with the especial object of making Christians of the Native army, so that when the army became Christians, there would be no delay in making Christians of the ryots.¹

¹ Quoted in the Appendix to the *History of the Indian Mutiny*, Kaye and Malleeson, Vol. II, p. 499.

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Time and again all over the country, troops were paraded and harangued by their officers. They explained, they reasoned, they argued. The greased cartridges were a mistake, they had all been withdrawn, troops need not bite off the end, they could grease their own, above all there was no wish to convert the men to Christianity. But always it was made clear that the British, though just, would not truckle to their subordinates. When arguments took no effect the officers saw fit to emphasize their words with white troops and cannon judiciously placed on parade. Then another fear came upon the native soldiery. It was the end; they were to be butchered by the white soldiers. They would be fallen upon in their lines and slaughtered as they slept, parades would be called upon mined parade-grounds and regiments blown to pieces; the British were only waiting to be rid of them all.

On February 26th, 1857, the 19th Native Infantry stationed at Berhampur mutinied rather than handle the cartridges on parade. The conflict of loyalties must have been severe, for after their one day of insubordination they allowed themselves to be marched under an absurdly small escort of European troops to Barrakpur, where they were disbanded. Meanwhile among the 34th Native Infantry at Barrackpur feeling was running very high and the situation, from the point of view of authority, was entirely out of hand. Yet the regiment made no attack upon its officers; even when

given a lead by a sepoy, Mangal Pandi, who made a foolhardy, single-handed attempt at armed insurrection, they confined their assistance to disobeying orders to put Pandi under arrest and watched without taking part while their officers effected his capture. On May 6th this regiment was also disbanded.

Many men of both the 19th and the 34th Native Infantry came from the Province of Oudh and after their disbandment they returned home, taking their grievances with them.

Thirty miles from Delhi, in the heart of northern India, lies the town of Meerut, a great military centre. Early in May 1857 eighty-five men of the 3rd Native Cavalry, stationed at Meerut, refused to handle cartridges on parade. A native court-martial, detailed to try them for mutiny, found these eighty-five soldiers guilty and sentenced them to imprisonment with hard labour for ten years. The execution of these sentences is vividly described by Sir John Kaye.

The morning (of the 9th of May) dawned lowering and gusty and the troops of the Meerut Brigade were drawn up on the ground of the 60th Rifles to see the prisoners formally dismissed to their doom. The 3rd Cavalry had received orders to attend unmounted. The European troops and the Artillery, with their field-guns, were so disposed as to threaten instant death to the Sepoys on the first symptom of resistance. Under a guard of Rifles and Carabineers, the eighty-five were then brought forward, clad in their regimental uni-

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forms—soldiers still; and then the sentence was read aloud, which was to convert soldiers into felons. Their accoutrements were taken from them, and their uniforms were stripped from their backs. Then the armourers and the smiths came forward with their shackles and their tools, and soon, in the presence of that great concourse of their old comrades, the eighty-five stood, with the outward symbols of their dire disgrace fastened upon them.¹

This exhibition was all that was needed to make the regiments take up arms. On the evening of May 10th the three Indian regiments stationed at Meerut shot their officers, released the prisoners, set fire to the cantonments and set out for Delhi. The town immediately rose in support. Everywhere English authority was uprooted, the jails opened, and European property seized. During the first night of insurrection there was a great slaughter of English men and women but those who survived that night found protection amongst the white regiments garrisoned at Meerut.

The mutineers were not pursued by the European regiments. At Delhi they met with little opposition: troops when ordered to fire upon their mutinous comrades replied with jeers, shots in the air and muskets trained on their officers.

Very soon the various mutinous elements in the city were united; Bahadur Shah, the aged remnant of Moghul glory, was nominated leader; the work

¹ Kaye and Malleon, *History of the Indian Mutiny*, Vol. II, p. 38.

of exterminating the foreigner began. That there were excesses of cruelty and bloodshed we are never allowed to forget. From English men and women who escaped from the Indians in revolt we have in the form of letters, biographies, reminiscences—mountains of the written word—human documents enthralling and true enough in themselves but painting one aspect of the situation in so over-personal and over-vivid a manner as to throw a false light on the whole. It would be hard to find any counter-balancing chronicle of the families rendered homeless by the British in their colonial wars, or of the people of Delhi when the city was recaptured and, after wholesale slaughter, cleared of its inhabitants. There is no record of the personal story of the peasant who was strung up on a mango tree because a trooper had heard him say "Cawnpore". The reminiscences cannot include those of the Brahmin who died unpurified after sweeping up blood, or describe what it feels like to be blown from a gun. It does the record of English achievement no service to hide the fact that the justice meted out in recaptured Delhi and other places was what the Indian might himself expect and was but a fraction of what he got when retribution came.

Delhi, then, was quickly taken. "Within twenty-four hours of the outbreak, Delhi was held by over 5000 armed soldiers." But in spite of the fact that pursuit by the white regiments at Meerut was

hourly expected, little was done to consolidate the position beyond the walls of the city.

Throughout the rest of the month of May the mutiny incredibly hung fire. In the north-west all chance of success was destroyed by disarmament of the native troops and fierce repressive measures; to the south and east mutiny smouldered but did not break out. The English force at Meerut, confused by the strength of the rebellion and conscious of its own deficiency in numbers, at first did nothing.

Delhi lay on the River Jumna, the Jumna joined the Ganges at Allahabad, the Ganges flowed down to Benares and thence to Calcutta, and Calcutta was the British capital of India. "If the mutineers leave Delhi in force", wrote the Lieutenant Governor sometime between May 15th and 24th, "it is plain that no wing of a corps, or even a single corps could withstand them."¹ And no such English force was available between Delhi and Calcutta. But the mutineers did not leave Delhi; rather the opposite occurred. When, later, other regiments all over the country rebelled they made, with some exceptions, a triumphant march to Delhi, the sentimental centre of the revolt.

On May 27th an English force, mainly from Meerut set out for Delhi, reaching Hindan on the 30th where they were opposed by troops from the Indian capital. The mutineers had a vast superiority of

¹ Kaye and Malleon, *History of the Indian Mutiny*, p. 135, Vol. III.

numbers but bad organization, ineffective leadership and inferiority of morale when face to face with white troops. They were unable to hold up the British column, which by the 1st June was well established on the ridge which was to prove the key to the recapture of Delhi.

From thence on all efforts to dislodge them proved ineffective. Many tributes are paid to individual bravery and daring on the part of the sepoys, but as a whole their attacks were without system; and although they inflicted severe casualties they never succeeded in puncturing the incredible British assurance that Delhi would be recaptured.

But this hanging about Delhi is very disheartening to the men [writes Lt. Fred Roberts (afterwards Field-Marshal Earl Roberts) on July 24th, to his mother], constant, almost daily alarms and scimmages, often under arms the whole day. . . . However it would be nothing if we had a good fight and done with it, but these Pandies are innumerable and never become less and we go pottering about perfectly aware that we can do nothing else. However please God before I write again, I shall have ridden through Delhi, and then I hope to join some Force going either towards Rohilkund and Oudh or Gwalior—all new countries to me, and all of which I am anxious to see.¹

We must leave this young subaltern under the walls of Delhi, where the "Pandies" are innumerable but only a decrepit shadow of a worn-out monarchy holds even nominal power, and look at

¹ *Letters written during the Indian Mutiny* by F. Roberts, p. 29.

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other parts of India before we tell of the storming of the crumbling city.

In the Punjab, the furthest province to the north-west held by the British, conquered only seven years before from the Sikhs, the sepoy mutiny was forestalled. It was forestalled by prompt, forceful action by European authorities and by a widespread display of disciplinary brutality, retribution in advance.

The Punjab was the key to the revolutionary situation, for if the English troops at Peshawar, Lahore and the other great military stations of the north-west had been annihilated, or even effectively cut off, not only would no mobile column have gone to the relief of Delhi but the gateway would have been opened to the old enemy of Britain, Dost Mohammed the Afghan ruler. But here the sepoy was far from home. The Sikh tribesmen of the Punjab had their grievances against the British but they were not the sepoys' grievances, and many of them were very antagonistic to the sepoys themselves. Also the country was prosperous; the seven years of British rule had been peaceful. No longer was the country overrun with intertribal wars, and for seven years the British had seen to the business of keeping the frontiers. The Sikhs had been too busy beating a reasonably large proportion of their swords into ploughshares and reaping the first peaceful harvests of generations to have yet felt the weight of British rule. For a while after the

Meerut rising the peasantry watched for the issue of the Sepoy-British clash, but the display of "nerve" and force by the far outnumbered British soon persuaded them that they were on the right side. In the few instances where successful mutinies occurred the mutineers found themselves in a definitely hostile country where they were denied food and shelter; in some cases they were even set upon by villagers and delivered up to the English.

On the 11th of May it was known in Lahore that the Meerut regiments had revolted. Robert Montgomery, the Judicial Commissioner, did not wait for signs of insurrection but at once set about laying a careful and quite brilliant plan for disarming the native troops at Lahore. And early on the morning of May 13th the European force of the garrison enforced the disarming of a body of troops four times its size.

The sepoy force at Amritsar was incapacitated at about the same time as that at Lahore, but at Ferozepore, although the British made the first move, only one of the two native regiments there was successfully disarmed. The other rose, seized and held the magazine for a short time, but when dislodged were left no choice but to try to make their way through difficult country towards Delhi. "Some were taken prisoner by their pursuers, some were given up by the villagers; but it is believed that some also succeeded in joining the sepoy force within the walls of Delhi."

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The great native forces of Peshawar were skilfully split into two bodies and disarmed in circumstances that rendered resistance hopeless. But the 55th Native Infantry, stationed twenty-four miles from Peshawar at Mardan, was declared to be in a state of mutiny and word sent to Peshawar for help. That they had actually broken into open mutiny seems doubtful; their colonel, Henry Spottiswoode, protested that he had implicit confidence in his men and implored that no steps should be taken against them. On the 24th, however, the advance of the column from Peshawar became known at Mardan and Colonel Spottiswoode, unable to contemplate the impending fate of his men, blew out his brains.

As soon as the column was sighted by the 55th they rushed out of the fort and away to the hills, but they were forced to give battle, defeated and dispersed, all except one hundred and twenty men who were taken prisoner and subsequently made an example to the rest of India.

"In respect to the mutineers of the 55th," wrote Sir John Lawrence,

they were taken fighting and so deserve little mercy. But on full reflection I should not put all to death. I do not think we should be justified in the eyes of the Almighty in doing so. A hundred and twenty men is a large number to put to death. Our object is to make an example to terrify others.¹

Forty was the number eventually selected.

Forty prisoners were brought out manacled and miserable to that dreadful punishment parade. The whole garrison of Peshawar was drawn up . . . thousands of outsiders poured in from the surrounding country to be spectators of the tremendous ceremony. . . . The Brigadier General appeared on parade . . . and ordered the sentence to be read. And this done, the grim ceremony commenced. The forty selected malefactors were executed at the mouth of guns.¹

This is a death that Lt. Fred Roberts (Lord Roberts) refers to in a light-hearted way in a letter to his "dearest mother".

Well, the troops assembled at Jhelum and we have come along this far (Amritsar) doing a little business on the road such as disarming regiments and executing mutineers. The death that seems to have the most effect is being blown from a gun. It is rather a horrible sight, but in these times we cannot be particular.²

Potential mutineers throughout the Punjab had been disarmed, but this did not altogether obviate the possibility of revolt, for it was perfectly feasible for the disarmed men, if they should desert, to obtain arms from inhabitants who might be sympathetic to the sepoy cause and whose weapons of war had but lately been put to agricultural use; they were believed to have a considerable number of arms hidden away. Reprisals against deserters were therefore very severe and every means of

¹ Kaye and Malletson, *History of the Indian Mutiny*, Vol. II, p. 368.

² F. Roberts, *Letters written during the Indian Mutiny*, p. 12.

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persuasion and reward used to enlist the aid of the Sikh communities in the capture of men from the disarmed regiments. Once retaken the fate of a deserter was certain. "One party after another of the fugitives was brought in, tried by a military court and sentenced to death; and they were hung up, or blown away, on some commanding ground, to be a warning and a terror to others."¹

After their disarmament in May the sepoy of Lahore were kept in their lines closely watched by the Europeans and their allies the Sikhs. During a dust storm on the 30th July the 26th Native Infantry succeeded in escaping from their guards. Their flight was held up by the River Ravi and there they were attacked by villagers and police. The mutineers suffered heavy casualties but some of their number succeeded in getting over the river, others reached an island in midstream where they were marooned; here Deputy Commissioner Cooper pursuing from Amritsar found them. His force, though vastly inferior to the mutineers in number was well armed, and the unfortunate men on the island allowed themselves to be bound and taken to the mainland by boat.

Thirty-six stalwart sepoy submitted to be bound by a single man and stocked like slaves into a hold in one of the two boats emptied for the purpose.²

Two hundred and eighty-two prisoners were

¹ Kaye and Malleon, Vol. II, p. 372.

² *Crisis in the Punjab* by F. Cooper.

taken and were all forced into one bastion at the police station. On the 1st of August, on the sole authority of Deputy Commissioner Cooper the prisoners were brought out, tied together in batches of ten and shot. After a hundred and fifty had been despatched "one of the executioners swooned away", and after two hundred and thirty-seven had been disposed of it was announced that the remainder refused to come out of the bastion. "The doors were opened, and, behold! . . . forty-five bodies, dead from fright, exhaustion, fatigue, heat and partial suffocation, were dragged into light."¹ Cooper expected this exploit to earn him fame and fortune. "The Governors of the Punjab", he says, "are of the true English stamp and mould and knew that England expected every man to do his duty, and that duty done, thanks them warmly for doing it."¹

Let us turn from India's north-west province, where the peasants stood by the English and the mutiny scarcely became a war, to an eastern province where the peasants turned mutiny into war. The contrast shows where the real strength of the Indian revolt lay.

Four hundred miles up the Ganges from Calcutta is the sacred city of Benares with its 200,000 inhabitants.² Three miles inland from the city in the suburb of Sikroli is the English military

¹ *Crisis in the Punjab*. By F. Cooper.

² This is an approximation of the population of Benares in 1857.

cantonment, where, in May 1857, the number of native soldiery vastly exceed the European. "The military force consisted of half a company of European artillery and three native regiments, the 37th Native Infantry, the Sikh regiment of Lodiana, and the 13th Irregular Cavalry." In all some 2000 men watched by some thirty British gunners.

Benares at this time was ripe for revolt. "The city always the most turbulent in India was now the more dangerous from the severity with which the high price of corn pressed upon the poorer classes; the Purbiah Sipahis, who had been more or less restless since the beginning of March now publicly called on their Gods to deliver them from the Faringhis,"¹ and some exiled members of the Delhi royal family who had lived in Benares for many years, found "ample means of gratifying their love of intrigue in dangerous efforts against the power that had brought them to the dust". Yet when the moment came, the revolt in Benares itself had none of the success achieved in other towns less favourably placed; the revolt outside the town went unorganized and unsupported.

The month of May passed in uneasy quiet. The Europeans of the English station were anxious for fear they should be caught unawares, but afraid also of taking overt precautions. They temporized with the issue of firearms among themselves, an outward show of calm confidence, and strenuous—

¹ Report of Mr. Taylor, Officiating Joint Magistrate.

and to some extent successful—efforts to reduce the price of corn.

On June 3rd the 17th Native Infantry at Azamgarh, mutinied and seized the treasure that was being escorted to Benares. The main body of the mutineers, with the treasure, marched triumphantly off towards the north while some of their comrades escorted their officers to Benares. News of this mutiny was likely to be an inspiration to the people of Benares and the sepoy of the station, but the last few days of the long three weeks since the news of Meerut and Delhi had come to Benares, had seen a change in the position of the English. Colonel Neill, with a force that brought the total number of European soldiery up to approximately two hundred and fifty, had arrived from Calcutta. It was determined that the native troops should at once be disarmed; disarmed before the news from Azamgarh took effect.

An immediate parade was ordered and the first to respond to the order were the 37th Native Infantry. They were formed up and ordered to place their muskets in the bells-of-arms. At first the order was obeyed but soon it was observed, by the now defenceless sepoy, that white troops, supported by field guns were advancing menacingly towards them. An indignant murmur arose, shots were fired, the confiscated arms recaptured and a battle begun. The English had the strength of preparedness on their side and the 37th, unable to withstand the

English musketry and gun-fire, were forced to disperse.

The irregular cavalry and the Sikh regiment were caught even more completely unawares. The cavalry at once joined their comrades of the 37th but, as a body, the Sikhs wavered. But before they had thrown in their lot with either side the cry was raised amongst the English that the Sikhs were about to charge the guns. At once the Sikh lines received a deadly hail of grape-shot, their lot was cast for them and with unavailing bravery they flung themselves upon the British guns. Three charges brought no result and at length they too were forced to disperse. "Thus", says Sir John Kaye, "the victory of the Few over the Many was soon completed."

In spite of the presence of armed sepoys, the people of Benares did not rise. The sound of firing from the parade-ground had been the signal for the panic-stricken congregation of Europeans in the Mint, a spot previously resolved on, and a hurried exodus of all missionaries from the city; but still the people did not rise. In the surrounding rural districts the story was a very different one.

It was not merely that the mutinous sepoys hanging about the adjacent villages were inciting others to rebellion (this was to be expected) but a great movement from within was beginning to make itself felt upon the surface of rural society, and for a while all traces of British rule were rapidly disappearing from the land . . . a few days sufficed to sweep away law and order and

to produce a revolution in property . . . all the large landholders and auction purchasers are paralysed and dispossessed. . . . To arrest this new danger, which threatened to become a gigantic one, overwhelming, irrepressible, our people had now to put forth all their strength.¹

On June 9th martial law was proclaimed in the divisions of Benares and Allahabad; English retribution had officially begun. Let us see what this martial law of which "such graphic details have been given by contemporary writers without a prevision of publicity" was like.

Our military officers were hunting down criminals of all kinds, and hanging them up with as little compunction as though they had been pariah-dogs, or jackals, or vermin of a baser kind. One contemporary writer has recorded that, on the morning after the disarming parade, the first thing he saw from the Mint was a "row of gallowses". A few days afterwards military courts or commissions were sitting daily, and sentencing old and young to be hanged with indiscriminate ferocity. . . . "On one occasion, some young boys, who, perhaps, in mere sport had flaunted rebel colours and gone about beating tom-toms, were tried and sentenced to death. One of the officers composing the court . . . went with tears in his eyes to the commanding officer imploring him to remit the sentence passed against these juvenile offenders, but with little effect on the side of mercy." And what was done with some show of formality, either of military or of criminal law, was as nothing, I fear, weighed against what was done

¹ Kaye and Malleon, p. 176, Vol. II.

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without any formality at all. Volunteer hanging parties went into the districts, and amateur executioners were not wanting to the occasion. One gentleman boasted of the numbers he had finished off quite "in an artistic manner", with mango-trees for gibbets and elephants for drops, the victims of this wild justice being strung up, as though for pastime, in "the form of a figure of eight".¹

All the while European troops had been pouring into the city from Calcutta. Neill's force was soon complete² and England was able to stretch her avenging hand further into India, further up the Ganges towards the heart of insurrection.

At Allahabad, seventy miles above Benares, revolt broke out on the 6th of June. The garrison consisted principally of the 6th Native Infantry, a regiment considered a model one for its loyalty and its discipline.

The news of the Benares rising, its denouement and the first of its consequences, took immediate effect in Allahabad. On the evening of the 6th of June the native soldiery rose, and killed as many officers as they were able, including eight young ensigns, a fact that has always called for great indignation among the British. A number of English officers and men escaped into the fort, where they remained until released by the arrival of Neill; their principal difficulty was in keeping morale up

¹ Kaye and Malleon, p. 177, Vol. II.

² About 2000 men.

and fever down, large quantities of liquor being stored near by.

The night of June 6th saw also the revolt of the city where there was great slaughter of the Christians, Eurasians and Europeans who had not been fortunate enough to reach the fort. But there was "no concert, no cohesion. Every man struck for himself", and no serious attempt was made to oust the English from the fort. By the 11th it was too late; Neill, the avenger, arrived from Benares. He immediately took the offensive, on an every-increasing scale as more troops came up, and by the 18th "the fighting was over. The work had been done. The English were masters, not merely of the fort but of the recovered city, and the European station from which they had been driven scarcely two weeks before."¹

Followed the work of retribution.

Martial Law had been proclaimed; these Terrible Acts passed by the Legislative Council in May and June were in full operation; and soldiers and civilians alike were holding Bloody Assize, or slaying Natives without any assize at all, regardless of sex or age. Afterwards the thirst for blood grew stronger still. It is on the records of our British Parliament, in papers sent home by the Governor-General of India in Council, that "the aged, women and children, are sacrificed, as well as those guilty of rebellion. They were not deliberately hanged, but burnt to death in their villages—perhaps now and then accidentally shot". Englishmen did not hesitate to

¹ Kaye and Malleeson, Vol. II, p. 201.

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boast, or to record their boastings in writings, that they had "spared no one", and that "peppering away at niggers" was very pleasant pastime, "enjoyed amazingly". And it has been stated, in a book patronized by high official authorities, that "for three months eight dead carts daily went their rounds from sunrise to sunset to take down the corpses which hung at the cross-roads and market places", and that "six thousand beings" had been thus summarily disposed of and launched into eternity.¹

This work of retribution it may be noted, began before the principal massacres—ininitely smaller in scope—of white men and women took place. Chief of these massacres was that of Cawnpore, which did not occur until a fortnight after the English hanging parties had begun their work round Benares and Allahabad.

Cawnpore is close to the border of the State of Oudh, and at the time of the mutiny was an undistinguished town of about 60,000 inhabitants; but for many years it had been one of the most important military stations in India, the headquarters of a division and the place of residence of the commanding general and his divisional staff. By 1857 however, the strength of the European personnel had been greatly reduced, partly by the demands of the recent Crimean war but mostly because of the numbers of English troops that were required to police the newly acquired provinces of Oudh and elsewhere. "The European force con-

¹ Kaye and Malleon, Vol. II, p. 203.

sisted (in May-June 1857) of the officers attached to the sepoy regiments; sixty men of the 84th Regiment, seventy-four of the 32nd who were invalided; sixty-five men of the Madras Fusiliers and fifty-nine men of the Company's artillery—about three hundred combatants in all.”¹ A great strength of native soldiery garrisoned the place, there were the 1st, the 53rd and the 56th Sepoy Regiments of infantry and the 2nd Regiment of Sepoy Cavalry, about 3000 men.

At Cawnpore the insurrection was of a character different from the retribution of Meerut or the panic of Benares. At Cawnpore the moment of insurrection was discussed, considered, planned and a definite alliance made between the sepoys and a discontented feudal ruler, Dundu Pant, Nana Sahib, the expropriated Peshwa. Curiously enough when news of the outbreaks at Meerut and Delhi reached Cawnpore Sir Hugh Wheeler, the general commanding the division, presumably thinking that a member of the nobility would support the British against what was believed to be a rebellious rabble, appealed to the Nana Sahib for men and help and handed over the Government treasury and the magazine (containing a great deal more guns and ammunition than either the general or any of his officers were aware of) to the Nana Sahib's men who were to guard it on behalf of the British! The

¹ Narrative of Mowbray-Thomson, a survivor of Cawnpore, quoted by Kaye and Malleon, p. 218.

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quality of an almost incredible complacency is continually to be found in the stories of the English in the Indian Mutiny. If the Nana Sahib had had a quarrel with the British Government and had lost, then the English could only assume that he had taken his beating "like a sportsman" since he was always polite, even as recently as on his tour of Lucknow and Cawnpore in the early months of 1857. (On other occasions the English complacency in the form of assurance that victory was certain helped them very materially in gaining victories when almost unbelievably outnumbered.)

By the end of May, more than three weeks after the mutiny at Meerut, there was no open insurrection at Cawnpore. The Europeans felt that trouble was brewing and crowded panic-stricken into the highly unsuitable barracks which they had decided to defend.

The sepoys were not yet ready to strike, but the 2nd Cavalry had prepared themselves for immediate insurrection, "quietly making arrangements to send away their families and their property and soon they had nothing in their huts but their drinking vessels."¹

On the 4th of June the Cavalry and the 1st Infantry set fire to their lines and made with all haste to the treasury and magazine guarded so conveniently by their ally the Nana Sahib. The 53rd and 56th followed next day and after the treasury had been

¹ Kaye and Malleeson, p. 228.

plundered the regiments turned for a triumphant march to Delhi. Here the Nana Sahib intervened. The troops had mutinied but Cawnpore was still in the hands of the English; Nana Sahib proposed that the mutineers should exterminate the Faringhi before going to Delhi. This seemed unlikely to be difficult, for the handful of British combatants that remained in the city were not likely to offer any serious resistance in defence of highly inadequate buildings that were cluttered up with non-combatants and sick. On June 6th the siege was laid but was at once met with a stubborn resistance and it was not until the 27th, after three weeks of terrible casualties, exposure, hunger and thirst, that General Wheeler surrendered conditionally on the survivors of his company being allowed a safe conduct by boat to Allahabad. An armistice was declared and the English conducted to the river and embarked upon the boats that were waiting aground in the shallow water. Then, either because the hate that was felt for the English found a spontaneous violent expression, or by pre-arranged plan, or by some accident, a fierce attack with sword, bayonet and musket was made upon the boats. The English who had been allowed a certain amount of ammunition, replied to the fire, but with little effect. The thatched roofs of the boats were soon alight; those attempting to escape through the shallows were cut down in the water. A number of women and children were made prisoner and taken back to

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the town and a very few (in the neighbourhood of half a dozen) officers and men made good their escape downstream. This was the notorious massacre at the boats.

The women and children were confined, with other non-combatant prisoners brought in from the surrounding districts, about 200 in all, in a small house near to the palace of the reinstated Peshwa. On July 15th, after news had been brought to the Nana Sahib of the victorious advance of a British column from the south to the very outskirts of Cawnpore, the imprisoned women and children were, at his command, slaughtered in cold blood and their bodies thrown into a nearby well.

This story of the massacres at Cawnpore has been told many times. It seems that we cannot forget them and almost always they are held to justify the savage violence with which the mutiny was put down all over India. Yet, as we have stated, much of the terrible retribution took place *before* the Cawnpore massacres.

The suffering of siege and massacre is horrible whoever endures it, but with the exception of the killing of *all* the women and children the fate of the English was no more than had been suffered, times without number, by groups of Indians defending Indian soil from invasion during the whole of the previous century. The slaughter of the women and children seems undoubtedly to have been the act of a single man—the Nana Sahib. Sepoys ordered

to do the killing are said to have refused, and butchers from the bazaar and men from the Nana's guard brought in to take their place. This act was in no sense one of the mutinous troops or of the people in revolt. But terrible vengeance was wreaked on these, while the Nana Sahib went unscathed, and in the autumn of 1858 escaped from India.

There remain two outstanding events to relate, the relief of Lucknow and the storming of Delhi.

Of all the minutely reported incidents of the sepoy mutiny, one of the favourites with English historians is the relief of Lucknow. And indeed the defence by a handful of Europeans of the Residency, from the 1st of July to the 25th of September 1857, had great strategic importance.

In the Province of Oudh the cause of the sepoy was the cause of the people, for not only did three-fifths of the recruits enlisted annually in the Bengal Army come from this province, but here every strata of society was ripe for the revolt that they looked to the sepoy to implement. Lucknow, the capital, was the garrison town of a great number of troops, in the proportion of about ten sepoys to one European soldier. In other stations in the province were native troops, regular and irregular, and military Europeans with their families.

As early as the 30th April men of the 7th Oudh Irregulars refused to bite or even touch the cartridges issued to them on parade. On the 3rd of

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May there was a half-hearted attempt at mutiny which was held up by a few officers who persuaded the men to return to their lines. On the next day this regiment was paraded and formally asked whether they would handle the cartridges or not. In spite of their answer that they would do so Sir Henry Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner, proceeded to disarm the troops under cover of a battery of guns, some Europeans and some native troops.

Seeing the imposing force arrayed before them, and the lighted portfires of the gunners, the sepoy broke ranks and attempted to escape with their arms. They were, however, quickly followed, brought back, disarmed and the ringleaders seized. Sir Henry Lawrence's next step seems to have been unique in the history of the mutiny. On May 12th he held a great reception at the Residency to which were invited "the native aristocracy, the European and native civil officials, the European and native officers and others." After a speech, made in Hindustani, in which he frankly discussed the difficulties of religion and caste, and the prevalent discontent of the district, Sir Henry proceeded to the ceremonious distribution of rewards and prizes to native officers and men who had remained loyal to their masters.

This attempt at conciliation was too late. For on the morning of May 13th news of the Meerut rising and the seizure of Delhi arrived in Lucknow. On

May 30th organized insurrection among the men of the 71st Native Regiment broke out. "At nine o'clock the evening gun was fired as usual. The men of the 71st Regiment, previously told off in parties, started off at this signal to fire the bungalows and murder their officers." After a few encounters with the British forces the mutineers retired outside the city. Next day the European force followed the mutineers and when the latter were shelled by the British guns, the men of the 7th Native Cavalry left the British lines to join their comrades of the 71st; together they made off into the country.

During the first two weeks of June risings occurred wherever Europeans were stationed in the province of Oudh, and by June 12th "every station in the province had been lost to the British. The mutiny was assuming the dimensions of a vast and partially organized insurrection". On the 12th June, Sir Henry Lawrence wrote:

. . . every outpost (I fear) has fallen, and we daily expect to be besieged by the confederated mutineers and their allies. The country is not yet thoroughly up, but every day brings it nearer that condition . . . the irregular infantry are behaving pretty well, but once we are besieged it will be black against white, with some very few exceptions.¹

During the middle of June mutinies amongst the sepoys and the native police continued and the

¹ Sir Henry Lawrence to Lt.-Governor of the North-West. Quoted by Kaye and Malleeson, p. 275, Vol. III.

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forces in revolt from all parts of the province collected at a place about seventeen miles from Lucknow. News of the surrender of the British at Cawnpore was received in Oudh on June 28th and gave a tremendous fillip to the cause of the mutineers. At once they turned to attack Lucknow, met a European force under Lawrence a few miles outside the city, and gained a complete victory, forcing the British troops back to the town and inflicting very heavy losses. In this battle the tactics of the sepoy, for once, seem to show real organization and leadership. When it came to the siege of the Residency, however, leadership and organization were not apparent and a British force, numbering in all about 1600 men, held for nearly three months a position that from the military point of view was quite indefensible, against a force possibly ten times its size and well equipped with arms and ammunition. On the 25th of September the first of a punitive force from the south fought their way to the assistance of the British in the besieged Residency. It was not however until well into 1858 that Lucknow was finally recaptured by the British. By this resistance the Few had again defeated the Many, for had the many thousands of sepoy supporters engaged in the siege of the British in the Lucknow Residency been liberated to consolidate the position of the mutineers in Oudh and elsewhere, the story of the sepoy war might have had a very different ending.

These mutinies at the great stations of Meerut, Benares, Allahabad, Cawnpore and Lucknow were in no sense isolated instances. By the end of May 1857 military revolts and civil disorders had taken place in nearly every garrison town throughout the North-West Provinces, Oudh and Central India. By the end of June the revolt had spread over a large area and had affected every class of Indian society. But the successful revolts went unco-ordinated, and as a general rule the sepoy regiments either made for Delhi, their arms in their hands, or formed themselves into marauding groups. In some localities leaders, such as the Nana Sahib at Cawnpore, established themselves in authority. The Rani of Jhansi, widow of the Raja whose state had been annexed, persuaded the garrison to accept her as leader and defend her capital. Khan Bahadur Khan set himself up as Viceroy in his district. At a later date Kunwar Singh collected the Dinapur mutineers to carry on a guerrilla warfare in Bihar, but these efforts at leadership were for the most part disconnected from each other and sometimes hampered the mutiny more than they advanced it.

Through most of the country, however, authority was destroyed and nothing set up to take its place; there was disorder among the people and disunity among the leaders. Potential allies throughout the length and breadth of India were scared off and no real effort was made to consolidate the tremen-

dous successes of the revolt in the very heart of British India. The English punitive and reconquering forces were never seriously attacked; invaluable time was allowed to pass and minute British forces were allowed to parade their incredible audacity in the face of overwhelming odds, and the districts through which they passed felt the heavy hand of British retribution.

The force that had subdued the revolt in Allahabad set out to relieve Cawnpore and Lucknow. This force consisted of an advance guard of 400 British soldiers, 130 Sikhs and 20 volunteers.¹ Advancing up the Ganges, this column defeated the Nana Sahib, took, sacked and held Cawnpore, "cleaned up" a hostile country and pressed on to Lucknow. After a series of successful engagements General Havelock, finding he could only hope to put 600 effective Europeans in the field, decided to fall back on his base and wait for reinforcements before pressing on to the relief of Lucknow. (This decision greatly infuriated Neill who was holding Cawnpore and considered Havelock's force quite sufficient for the job in hand.) But still the tiny British forces were not successfully attacked. Later on, it is true, the native forces rallied and Lucknow had to be relieved three times before British dominion was finally re-established in Oudh.

By the 12th September Delhi, strongly fortified and defended by a native force which outnumbered

¹ *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 451.

even the reinforced attackers three to one, fell to the British. Shah Bahadur Shah was made prisoner, his sons shot and the city ruthlessly sacked. "All the city people found within the walls when our troops entered were bayoneted on the spot; the number was considerable as you may suppose when I tell you that in some houses forty or fifty persons were hiding."¹

By the end of September, the tide had turned and from thence onwards the rebel forces were divided and systematically hunted down. By the autumn of 1858 British rule in India was again unchallenged.

The immediate effect upon British policy in India of the 1857 Mutiny and the war which followed, was threefold. "The Crown finally assumed control of the Indian Government, the army was completely reorganized, and a new attitude adopted towards the Indian States."² The first of these changes moved the Government of India from Leadenhall Street to Whitehall but for practical purposes had little effect upon the inhabitants of the "brightest jewel". The reorganization of the armed forces in India was complete. All the soldiers of the Company became soldiers of the Crown; the number of white troops was increased (in 1863 to 65,000); the artillery was kept entirely in the hands of Europeans; the number of native troops was reduced

¹ Letter in the *Bombay Telegraph* quoted by Montgomery Martin in *The Indian Empire*, VIII, 449.

² *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*.

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(by 1863 to 140,000) and were enlisted less from high caste Bengalis and more from Sikhs and Gurkhas, and within the native army itself small communities of different races and religions were counterbalanced.

The reorganization did not only affect the rank and file.

It is curious to note [writes Lord Roberts] how nearly every military officer who held a command or high position on the staff in Bengal when the Mutiny broke out, disappeared from the scene in the first few weeks, and was never heard of officially again. Some were killed, some died of disease, but the great majority failed completely to fulfil the duties of the positions they held, and were consequently considered unfit for further employment. Two Generals of Divisions were removed from their command, seven Brigadiers were found wanting in the hour of need, and out of the 73 regiments of Cavalry and Infantry which mutinied, only four commanding officers were given other commands, younger officers being selected to train and command the new regiments.¹

The Government by proclamation in 1858 gave up all claim to escheatment in default of an heir and assured the Princes of Her Majesty's desire to see their rule perpetuated. Many princes, notably Patiala who had kept open for the British the road between Delhi and Simla to the north, were rewarded for their services to the government and in

¹ *Forty-One Years in India*. By Earl Roberts (Popular Edition), p. 244.

1881 Mysore, a fertile area of 30,000 square miles, was restored to a member of the ruling family.

By these changes in policy the feudal princes were made firm allies of British rule in India, and have remained so ever since. The mutiny could not reappear in its 1857 form, as an alliance or simultaneous revolt of native soldier, dispossessed prince, and ruined peasant. Not until new social classes and new ideas had grown up could the effect of its vast extent, its nearness to success in some areas, be felt even as a memory stirring men towards action, a living memory at the back of "troubled minds". But one incident in the wave of disobedience, demand for independence, non-co-operation, that swept over India in 1930, may be a reminder of the power of the past to mould the future, even when that past seems safely buried in the unnamed graves of mutineers. In April 1930, in Peshawar, men of a justly famous Hindu regiment refused to fire on a crowd of demonstrators.

Peshawar, the frontier city of the north-west, was turbulent with peasants, tribesmen, and the people of the city, marching through the streets to demand the release of the prisoners—the civil disobedience campaign had begun on April 6th, and the prisons and concentration camps were filling—and to demand Swaraj, self-rule, independence. Troops, English and Indian, barred their way within the city, guarding the important centres. The overwhelming, apparently irresistible threat of modern

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machinery backed the troops; armoured cars were noisy in the narrow streets. Some few shots were fired, to prove that the troops and the machine-guns were not there for show, but the crowds pressed closer.

An armoured car, trapped in a street where there was not room to turn, was motionless when a motor cycle despatch rider rode up; he was hustled off his machine and petrol from it spilt on the roadway. The petrol caught fire or was fired; the blazing machine was slung under the armoured car; the men in the car escaped hurriedly. Then troops began to shoot in earnest, to kill; sixty-five dead and a hundred and fifty wounded.

Two platoons of the 18th Royal Garwhali Rifles, crack troops, Hindus, separated by language and religion from the Moslem crowds, had been standing motionless for hours across the open side of a "native" bazaar, bayonets fixed, rifles charged. The crowd, always increasing and growing bolder, had not tried to attack them; not a stone had been thrown; it had appealed to them in half the languages of India, reminding them that they also were Indians. The order at last came to fire: they refused. They broke ranks; some handed over their rifles; all fraternized, mingled with the crowd that swept past them.

The shooting had no effect except to bring more thousands into the streets; the mutiny had an immediate effect. All troops were at once withdrawn

from Peshawar, which was an Indian city for a fortnight, completely without British control. Not until overwhelming British forces had been brought up, and air squadrons concentrated, was Peshawar retaken, without resistance.

Seventeen of the Garwhali Riflemen were tried by court-martial; one was sentenced to transportation for life, a second to fifteen years in prison; the rest received sentences varying from three to ten years. They joined the 50,000 who were jailed for political offences in India in that year. They are thought of, by those who believe in India as an independent nation, as successors to the sepoy of the mutiny, and as pioneers of a future India in which Hindu and Mohammedan will no longer be divided.

CHAPTER FIVE

WORLD WINTER



MAY in 1917 was the end of a cruel winter. Men who lived somehow in lines of trenches between Switzerland and the sea could not remember a more terrible year. January and February had been months of bitter black frost, gripping the earth as tightly as the trench deadlock gripped the armies. To get water troops waited in line at the wells, where crowbars broke small holes in the two-foot ice. March was a gale, snow and sleet and the cold rain, the roads soft and dragging at the feet, the communication trenches in many places bank-full ditches of yellow ugly water. When the trenches themselves thawed, in March and early April, their walls fell in, revetments floated, traverses fell in heaps of mud. Big winds tore at canvas shelters rotted by rain and exposure; dugouts were flooded, wooden camps were desolate swamps. Armies had been gathered and billeted and encamped in the dry hard frost, pressed belly-close to earth in little valleys to hide from enemy eyes; when the thaw and the rain came their camps were disastrously

waterlogged. Winter had ended; this was spring.

In April came the "big push". British and Canadian troops took Vimy Ridge; their attack was intended mainly to draw German reserves towards them. The principal blow, by three strong French armies, came a few days later, between Soissons and Reims. It was a failure. The cost was near 100,000 dead, 150,000 wounded. For the ground gained, for the Germans killed and prisoners (about 35,000 dead, 40,000 prisoners, 130,000 wounded) this was not a very high cost, reckoned by other ghastly bargains of trench warfare. The Somme had cost the French more, although the British carried the main burden of that battle. Offensives in Champagne and Artois in 1915 had cost double the 1917 figure, for less result. But all the same this defeat, in April 1917, the dead men on the German wire and the dead men in close swathes before the German machine-guns, roused nearly half the French army to protest, insubordination, mutiny.

Before we describe the course of this mutiny, let us look behind it to its causes. The failure was the detonator; what was the explosive ready to be touched off? The explosive was a mixture of hope, boredom, military knowledge, and a democratic hatred of arbitrary discipline.

"The Nivelle defeat . . . well-nigh blasted Allied hopes." wrote General Pershing, head of the American army.¹ Its effect was largely due to the greatness

¹ *My Experiences in the World War*, London, 1931, p. 71.

of the hopes that had been raised before it took place. This was, at last, to be the "break-through", and after it German collapse was certain; after this victory there would be glory and peace. These hopes shone out against the grey of hopeless winter, the long bitter experience of lines that could not be broken, the dragging misery of Verdun and the Somme.

General Nivelle was a rather younger man than many of the army commanders, "an officer whose modesty, whose personality, whose lucidity of expression, exercised an almost universal charm".¹ He had held command of an army for only five months, but during that time had won fame by an attack near Verdun, carried out with great speed and determination, by which the Germans had been surprised and enough ground won to free the fortress from immediate danger. France, and all the armies, had suffered too long the dominance of old men like those whom Kipling's soldier had condemned fifteen years before with the vulgar irreplaceable phrase: "'eavy-sterned". Of these old men none had been heavier than the French Commander-in-Chief, Joffre, the placid square, bulky peasant figure who sat in an office without maps, at a table without papers, maintaining a

¹ Churchill, *The World Crisis*, 1916-18. Part I, p. 261.

One factor that helped to bring Nivelle to supreme command was his standing as a "plain man". He was Robert Nivelle; therefore it was not difficult to promote him over the head of a senior such as, for instance, Noel-Marie-Joseph-Edouard, Vicomte de Currières de Castelnau.

comfortable routine in which messages of admiration from all over the world, and personal answers to them, were given first attention; Joffre, the serene sleeper, the man with a stout Gascon appetite, who made little lumbering jokes and called his aide-de-camp "Tou-Tou"; Joffre who had been, to the French, a solid embodiment of their will to go on with the war to the end, and now had become to their despair the embodiment of a calm acceptance that the war was endless.¹ Joffre had gone; Nivelle came.

In January 1917, three months before opening his offensive movement, General Nivelle declared: "We shall break the German front at will, provided we do not attack it at its strongest point, and provided we carry out our operation by means of surprise and sudden attack, in from twenty-four to forty-eight hours." So writes Painlevé, in *How I Appointed Foch and Pétain*. Nivelle made his view clear in a note to his army commanders, even earlier; on Christmas Eve, 1916, twelve days after his appointment as commander-in-chief, he wrote that the break-through was possible if made "at a single stroke by a sudden attack" and used the phrase "attaque brusquée" which has a sharper, more abrupt feeling than the English words give.²

¹ "Joffre was not a general, but a national nerve sedative."—Liddell Hart in *Reputations*, London, 1928, p. 49.

² "Brusquer la fortune" is to tempt fortune; it is embodied in the language that the French way of tempting fortune is to be hasty, precipitate, brusque—a Nivelle.

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Nivelle stressed in his orders "the character of violence, of brutality and rapidity which should clothe the offensive, and in particular its first phase, the break-through". During the months of January, February, March, the bitter winter and the drenching end of winter, a flood of orders, exhortations, spread this fine-phrased, mystical reliance on a single vast overwhelming blow through all the ranks of the French army. These orders even went to troops in the line. A memorandum giving fully Nivelle's "New Principles of the Offensive" was captured in front-line trenches by the Germans on March 3rd. The order of attack of the French Fifth Army, the right wing of the battle, naming the attacking units, their objectives, their lines of approach, the way they would outflank the stronger positions opposite them, was captured on March 6th, ten days before the battle opened. This folly was one of the reasons for the completeness of Nivelle's failure. But in the event the effect of letting these documents get into French hands was worse than the effect of their capture by the Germans. They convinced the French Army. They only warned the Germans.

There was something feverish about this hope, something of real physical fever in the stream of orders and instructions that flowed from Nivelle's headquarters. The fever was that of tuberculosis, mystic apocalyptic hope fostered by *spes phthysica*, the pathetic impatient optimism that so often affects

consumptives. For Nivelles's chief of staff, Colonel d'Alençon, was in the closing stages of consumption. Churchill, following Jean de Pierrefeu, gives a picture of this man that explains much: "immensely tall and thin, dark, sallow, cadaverous, silent, sombre, full of suppressed fire—a man absorbed in his convictions and ideas. . . . He had but one year to live, and consequently but one coup to play. . . . He knew that his time was short. . . . Such a personal situation is not favourable to the practical common sense and judgment peculiarly required in a chief of staff."¹

Hope is explosive in victory or defeat. But it is particularly explosive when men are living "under muddy skies", which hide the horizon and make victory seem an endless distance away. One of the greatest of France's writers, Henri Barbusse, in his *Under Fire*,² gave an unforgettable picture of the misery against which this hope shone in relief. The book was published in 1916. In March, 1917, a review of this book appeared in the *Journal de Genève* over the signature of another of the writers whose work is the honour of the French language, Romain Rolland. From his review we quote at length: not to remind those readers who endured life in the trenches of what it was like—that is unnecessary, and words are not so powerful—nor

¹ *World Crisis*, 1916-18.

² *Le Feu, Journal d'une Escouade*, Flammarion, Paris, 1916. English translation, *Under Fire, The Story of a Squad*, Dent, London, 1917.

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mainly to give the essence of this remarkable book; we quote this review as a contemporary document of the period before the mutinies of 1917, the period during which Nivelle was rousing to fever pitch the hopes of the French armies. This review gives part of the background against which these hopes grew:¹

The armies remain buried for years, at the bottom of an eternal battlefield, closely packed, "chained shoulder to shoulder", huddling together "against the rain which descends from the skies, against the mud which oozes from the ground, against the cold, an emanation from the infinite which is all-pervading". The soldiers, uncouthly rigged out in skins, rolls of blanket . . . cardigans, and more cardigans, squares of oilcloth, fur caps . . . hoods of tarpaulin, rubber, weatherproof cloth . . . look like cave men, gorillas, troglodytes. . . .

The individual soul hardly exists; it is a mere shell. Beneath that shell, the collective soul, suffering, overwhelmed with fatigue, brutalized by the noise, poisoned by the smoke, endures infinite boredom, drowns, waits, waits unendingly. It is a "waiting-machine". It no longer tries to think; "it has given up the attempt to understand, it has renounced being itself". These are not soldiers, they don't wish to be soldiers, they are men. "They are men, good fellows of all kinds, rudely torn away from life; they are ignorant, not easily carried away, men of narrow outlook, but full of common sense which sometimes gets out of gear. They are inclined to go where they are led and to do as they are bid. They are tough, and able to bear a great deal. Simple men

¹ From *The Forerunners*, by Romain Rolland, Allen & Unwin, London, 1920.

who have been artificially simplified yet more, and in whom, by the force of circumstances, the primitive instincts have become accentuated: the instinct of self-preservation, egoism, the dogged hope of living through, the lust of eating, drinking, and sleeping." Even amid the dangers of an artillery attack, within a few hours they get bored, yawn, play cards, talk nonsense, "snatch forty winks"—in a word, they are bored. "The overwhelming vastness of these great bombardments wearies the mind." They pass through a hell of suffering and forget all about it. "We've seen too much, and everything we saw was too much. We are not built to take all that in. It escapes from us in every direction; we are too small. We are forgetting-machines. Men are beings which think little; above all, they forget." . . .

The human cry from these lowly fellows is anonymous. We hardly know who has been speaking, for, often enough, all share in a common thought. Born out of common trials, this thought brings them much closer to the other unfortunates in the enemy trenches than to the rest of the world away there in the rear. For visitors from the rear, "trench tourists", for people in the rear, journalists "who exploit the public misery", bellicose intellectuals, the soldiers unite in showing a contempt which is free from violence but knows no bounds. To them has come "the revelation of the great reality": a difference between human beings, a difference far profounder and with far more impassable barriers than those of race: the sharp, glaring, and inalterable distinction, in the population of every country, between those who profit and those who suffer, those who have been compelled to sacrifice everything, those who give to the uttermost of their numbers, of their strength, and of their martyrdom, those over whom the others march forward smiling and successful.

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One to whom this revelation has come, says bitterly: "That sort of thing does not encourage one to die!"

But none the less this man meets his death bravely, meekly, like the others. . . .

"What do people fight for?"—"No one knows what they fight for, but we know whom they fight for. They fight for the pleasure of the few."

The soldiers reckon up these few: "the fighters, those born to power"; those who say, "the races hate one another"; those who say, "I grow fat on the war"; those who say, "there always has been war and there always will be"; those who say, "bow your head, and trust in God"; the sabre-rattlers, the profiteers, the ghouls who batten on the spoils; "the slaves of the past, the traditionalists, for whom an abuse has the force of law because it is of old date."

"Such as these are your enemies quite as much as any of the German soldiers who now share your wretchedness. The German soldiers are no more than poor dupes odiously betrayed and brutalized, domesticated beasts. . . . But the others are your enemies wherever they were born, whatever the fashion in which they utter their names, and whatever the language in which they lie. Look at them in the heavens above, and on the earth beneath! Look at them everywhere! Look well, till you know them, that you may never forget their faces!"

Such is the wail of these armies. But the book closes with a note of hope, with the unspoken oath of international brotherhood. . . .

The fact that among these humble folk, among those who, like the third estate in '89, are nothing and shall be all—that in this proletariat of the armies there is obscurely forming an awareness of universal humanity—that so bold a voice can be raised from France—that those who are actually fighting can make a heroic effort

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to ignore environing wretchedness and imminent death, to dream of the fraternal union of the warring peoples—I find in this a greatness which surpasses that of all the victories, I find something whose poignant splendour will survive the splendour of battle. I find something which will, I hope, put an end to war.

February 1917.

“An end to war”—with these words Rolland ends his review of Barbusse. In some slang phrase equivalent to our own “Roll on duration!” the end of war must have been on the lips of all “the proletariat of the armies” of France. Barbusse was not the only man who voiced this longing. In January 1917, a French soldier, Paul Husson, published his note-book, *L'Holocauste*. Two short quotations will show its quality:¹

Everyone was cursing the war, everyone hated it. Some were saying: “Frenchmen or Germans, they are men like ourselves, they suffer as we do in body and in mind. Do not they, too, dream of the homecoming?”

Lying prone, while the shells whistle overhead, I think. Die! Why should we die on this battlefield? . . . Die for civilization, for the freedom of the nations? Words, words, words. We are dying because men are wild beasts, killing one another. We are dying for bales of merchandise; we are dying for squabbles about money.

In March 1917, a review, *Vivre*, published a

¹ Paul Husson, *L'Holocauste* (a collection entitled *Vers et Prose*, published by F. Lacroix, 19, rue de Tournon, Paris, January 10th, 1917).

leading article by André Delemer, which in spite of its wordy vagueness showed the feeling spreading through the armies:

Young man of my generation, it is you of whom I think as I write these lines, you whom I do not know, though I know that you are still fighting or that you have returned broken from the trenches. I have met you in the street, wearing an almost shamefaced air, doing your best to conceal some infirmity; but in your eyes I have read the intensity of your inward agony. I know the terrible hours through which you have lived, and I know that those who have endured like trials end by having like souls. . . . I know your doubts; I share your uneasiness. I know how you are obsessed with the question, "What next?" You, too, are asking what can be seen from the heights, and what is going to happen. I understand your "What next?"—"To live!" You sing this straight to the hearts of all of us. "To live!" You embody the cry of our cruel epoch. I have heard this cry, simple yet tremendous, from the lips of the wounded who were aware of the oncoming footsteps of victorious death. I have heard it in the trenches murmured low. . . .¹

One more witness, to show this feeling, after the Nivelle failure, grown to bitterness, looking for revenge. Maurice Wullens, editor of a school-teachers' journal, had been cited in army orders as follows:

Wullens (Maurice) soldier of the second class in the eighth company of the seventy-third infantry regiment, a good soldier to whom fear was unknown, dangerously

¹ From *The Forerunners*.

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wounded during the defence, against a superior force, of a post which had been entrusted to him.¹

Wullens addresses those who are praising war, writing of "glory", as follows:

I have come from this war whose praises you are singing—I who write . . . I have my honourable mention, my war cross: I never wear it. I spent seven months a war prisoner, before being sent home incapacitated by my wound. I could flood you with war anecdotes, I have no desire to do anything of the kind. Nevertheless I am writing a book on the war. I compress into it all that my heart has felt, all that one man has suffered during these months of unspeakable horror, and likewise all the joy he experienced when he came to perceive, by rare flashes of light, that humanity still lives, that kindness still exists, on both sides of the Rhine the world over. You, M.B., sing "The War in which it is beautiful and sweet to die for our country!" All those who have faced this death will tell you that while it may have been necessary, it was neither beautiful nor sweet. You glorify the sublime and tattered tri-colour; blue is the blouse of our workmen; white is the cornette of our splendid sisters of charity. . . . You will excuse me for cutting you short before coming to the red, for my unaided memory here suffices me: the red blood of my wounds flowing and clotting on the frozen mud of Argonne that terrible morning in December 1914; the red mud of pestilential slaughter houses; the shattered heads of dead comrades; mangled stumps irrigated with peroxide solution so that the living corruption was half hidden by bloodstained foam. . . .

¹ From *The Forerunners*.

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Romain Rolland's review was published in Switzerland, but Barbusse's book found a French publisher—in 1916—and the others whom we have quoted wrote freely in France. There is no parallel in other countries to this freedom. In the Kaiser's Germany Stephan Zweig wrote in 1916 an anti-war parable: "The Tower of Babel"¹ that was mournfully pacifist; but it had none of the "damn your eyes" spirit of the French protests. It did not, like Barbusse, divide the world into two sections, the ordinary man, on either side of the trenches, and the exploiting, ruling, war-making groups whose hands held tightly the weapons of persuasion and force. In Tsarist Russia there was very plain speaking—but underground, illegally, in pamphlets printed on "Bible paper" (because that is the thinnest opaque paper there is), and little smudged journals smuggled from Sweden to Finland, from Finland to Moscow, Baku, or Siberia. There was no open freedom until the Tsar fell, and even then the men determined to end war had to hide themselves sometimes, dissimulate often, before they reached power. In Britain the actual censorship, powerful enough, was reinforced by the inability of those who could write in Britain, to escape from the eiderdown, close-woven blankets, cool clean-white linen sheets of idealism, in which British thought had slumbered for a generation. Two poets got out of that deep stifling bed, Sassoon

¹ See the *Left Review*, London, October 1934.

and Owen, but only the former got his poems published. They were better poems, and in some ways better propaganda against the war, than had been published anywhere else in Europe, but they were—probably—not on sale at more than a score of bookshops in the United Kingdom. And although they were so simple as to appeal to almost every man in the ranks who happened, by half-miraculous accident, to come across them, they were poems: as such, and comprehensibly, not the sort of stuff that men in the line or “resting” would insist on “scrounging” somehow. H. G. Wells, partly because not—or should one write not then?—“a gentleman” almost lifted himself as far as opposition to the war in *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*; but an “almost” is often very far from the complete. *The Nation* querulously and in highbrow despair, *The Cambridge Magazine* pedantically, accurately, and with persistence, were opposing the war from an idealist position, some tiny journals from abstract-socialist or Quaker-pacifist standpoints. They were not allowed to reach the British armies; they did not succeed, in Britain itself, in escaping the weight of monopoly boycott, distribution “rings”, the Defence of the Realm Act; they reached few people, and most of these people isolated by their idealist incapacity from the common man of Britain, the butcher, baker, candlestick maker enrolled under the “Derby Scheme”, the conscript of next month, the trade unionist with sons in the army, the hun-

dreds of thousands of children shovelled out to war as soon as they were eighteen or nineteen. In Britain the typical war-resister, in 1917, was a crank; in France he was an ordinary French individualist, the sort of Frenchman produced by revolutions, the Commune, the Dreyfus case, the rudely argumentative small-town café. Protests against the war, by Barbusse and the others we have quoted, appeared in print and were widely bought—widely, at least, in the case of Barbusse and a few others—because France is not by principle but by deep-rooted habit of life, a country of the people, a democracy.

The principles of French law are illiberal, authoritarian, protective; but the life and literature of the French is liberal, democratic, venturous. Papers could be suppressed in France, by decree; Clemenceau's paper was. Dangerous men could be jailed, by frame-up; Joseph Caillaux, ex-Premier, was. But there was always a bubbling of new papers; there was always stamping-ground for the man angry enough to say it aloud. Particularly if he said it well.

There is a real respect in France, among coal-heavers as noticeable as among journalists, for the French language. Those who can make that static language move, can warm the frozen words to life and combine the inevitable precisions of logical phrases into sentences that are really new, have no graveyard smell—these people the French call

masters (in courtesy, and quarrelling over their precedence, and being in fact free men refusing to acknowledge any mastery except that of skill, or talent, or genius) and a writer in France has honour after, but not immeasurably far after, a racing cyclist. Besides being democrats, perhaps because democrats, the French respect intelligence. Because of this the full, realist, intelligent protests of civilized and angry men, in 1916 and 1917, caught in a barbarous and unending war, got an audience far more serious and more widespread and more effective than anywhere else—Tsarist Russia always excepted; outside Russia Lenin and others wrote, and inside Russia the groups that Stalin and others like him had built, distributed, the polemics, theses, arguments, predictions of the Bolsheviks. But the Russian growth was, by Russia's rulers' choice, in the dark; it came into the light early in 1917 already budding, and strange to those who knew nothing of its underground life; the French growth of resistance to war grew in the light, in spite of the drying sun of money's power, the dazing pressure of an effective, competent "Great Power" state.

Here are two factors in the French mutinies of 1917: foiled hopes with a background of great misery, anger given a free hearing. Others may be mentioned shortly: boredom, military knowledge, hatred of discipline of the sort endured.

Boredom, of the black violent sort known to the

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French as "le cafard", was the typical habit of mind of the French veteran in discomfort. The French troops had none of the distractions provided for the English. No equivalent existed to the Y.M.C.A.; there was not the organized, patronizing, stupid yet efficient "welfare work" performed on the reluctant English. The French had very little money to spend and few canteens. They were not overfed on the average, as the English were; they were not in a foreign country, to be laughed at as the English laughed. Their officers of the lower ranks were as a rule men not very different from themselves and living very much as they did; they had not, as the English had, a separate officer-caste parading their normalities and eccentricities, their caste comforts and infuriating but diverting ignorances and affectations even in the trenches. "Knows sweet —", said our cook-corporal of the Brigadier-General when the latter came round unexpectedly. "But he's as funny as a monkey and squeaks jus' like a Punch-and-Judy box." The French had very seldom these fine sights; but no English brigade owned less than three of them. Canadians, Scots, Welsh, Australians had all their own diversions, some stronger and some much weaker than the English; but the French had none. So they were bored.

But they were also soldiers, to an extent unusual to the British rank-and-file. War had been, to the pre-war British, a romanticized boxing-match, a

trippers' field-day to Mafeking, a sport seen from the touch-line. War to the French was an art, a discipline, in which their leaders had failed openly, tragically, shamefully, before the whole world, at the time when their fathers or grandfathers were young, but in which they, the French people, had led and taught the world not so long ago, in the days of Napoleon. The French rank-and-file could and did criticize tactics and strategy, not with the grumbling and justified cynicism of the English but with a passionate knowledge and identification of themselves with their staff and their commanders, such as the English have for the tacticians and strategists of the football field. When they mutinied, the phrase first shouted was "Down with war!" But the second was "Down with the incapable leaders!"

Discipline in the French armies was different from that in other forces. There was little "spit and polish" and no goose-step. Châlons is far from Aldershot and Potsdam both. But it was arbitrary—not constantly repressive, but on occasions flagrantly unjust. The terrible case of a divisional commander who ordered the execution of a number of men from his division, because their companies had failed to take a German strong-point that he had promised to capture, is an example of this injustice pressed to its highest level. The men executed, who had not behaved any differently from those alongside them, had to be picked out by their company commanders. They were condemned for

desertion in face of the enemy, because with the remnants of their companies they had retreated from the German second line—and were shot by men of the same division. Not till many years after the war, when relatives got an appeal through the cumbrous processes of justice, were their names cleared; the commander who had ordered their deaths was then dead.

Such incidents, it should be said, were not typical; possibly this was the only case in which the death penalty was imposed in this way. But arbitrary punishments, from fatigues to inclusion in a penal battalion of convict cannon-fodder, was normal in the French armies, and clashed with the highly developed sense of justice that is part of the French character. Underlying several reasons for this is one reason that is fundamental: there was a gulf, unbridgeable, between the outlook of the commanders and of the soldiers. The French high command had been trained for generations to believe that the one factor on which they must rely, for victory over Germany, was the superhuman gallantry of the French troops in attack, the *furia Franchese*. Their theory of war—faced with an opponent possessing larger armies, better equipment, and unapproachable qualities of scientific organization—had been twisted to a mystical dependence on offensive action. This ran through all their preparation for war: the “Plan XVII”, which controlled the disposition and use of their forces in the first period of

the war, was a plan for an offensive *à l'outrance*. Their General Staff instructions on the handling of large units of troops in battle, issued late in 1913, never mentioned machine-guns—they were then counted defensive weapons, and therefore this immensely detailed collection of instructions ignored them. Jean de Pierrefeu, who held a responsible position at French G.H.Q. throughout the war, comments bitterly on this “Bergsonian” theory of the General Staff:

... it was in such an atmosphere that Plan No. 17 was elaborated. This plan, which ignored the intentions of the enemy, the forces which would be engaged, and the material means available, was a plan to launch the French army in a wild, irresistible, decisive attack. Or at least that was what the attack was meant to be!

But does not the fact emerge that this contempt for the niceties of manoeuvre—an intellectual heritage from the great leaders of the past—this refusal to exercise the faculties of prevision and of discernment and of applying the discursive methods of reasoning and analysis, this unique recourse, in short, to the will-to-attack of the troops, denote above all else a singular disdain for culture? In 1914 it was possible to affirm that there was in the army, and indeed throughout France, a serious decline in intellectual values. Disregard of the humanities held sway at the *Ecole de Guerre* as well as in the Sorbonne. Since all that mattered was to put oneself in a state of intuition—I mean, to have the offensive will-to-victory—why grow pale in poring over text-books and in searching for the secret possessed and applied by the masters of battle? An abuse of reasoning power and

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an exhaustive examination of tactical situations destroys that offensive *élan* which alone counts. The best dispositions in the world can be overwhelmed by the tenacious impetuosity of a leader of men who hurls himself heroically into the fray. An ancient idea this, familiar enough to the warrior, a remnant of the old superstitions of barbarous times when the soldier firmly believed that his invincible leader was inspired by God or by the Devil and followed him blindly.¹

This primitive and unintelligent idea of war dominated not only the staffs: the active commanders of the line were made in this mould. Logical, sensitively intelligent commanders such as General Lanrezac were weeded out in the first months of war; power fell more and more into the hands of the men who believed that the will-to-win mattered beyond all else—until power came to their supreme representative, Nivelle. And he failed.

Meanwhile the war was teaching the French infantry its bitter lessons. They were veterans, by 1916, old soldiers. They had no relish for the mystical, for unsupported valour. They looked warily from their trenches towards the wary invisible enemy beyond the wire. At Verdun they showed incomparable gallantry in defence, but they refused to exhibit enthusiasm when sent "over the top" in trench raids and little offensives designed "to keep up the fighting spirit of the troops". Soldiers of un-

¹ Jean de Pierrefeu, *Plutarch Lied*. London, 1924, p. 37. See also Liddell Hart, *Reputations*; he writes of the French Staff's theory as "folly", and the generals who accepted it as "wholly culpable".

breakable courage, they were sullen at waste of lives. And, being Frenchmen, displayed their sullenness with appropriate gestures.

In 1916 and the first half of 1917 the Staffs and the Commands met this growing sullen "bad feeling" boldly, in two ways. One was propaganda: reports from the armies were "written up" to give the impression that the men in the trenches were in comfort and happy. One such article, on conditions with the Fifth Army, Jean de Pierrefeu wrote; he says ruefully that:

. . . the article had scarcely appeared when we received from the B.M.I. a frantic telephone message. Two hundred thousand indignant letters had reached the newspapers in three days from every part of the Front! Exasperated soldiers insisted that they were wading in mud and water, that they lacked warm clothing, that they had neither hot food nor hot drinks, that they had not washed for weeks for want of clean water, that their camp had not enough straw, let alone stoves or lamps and so forth. It was, in short, a violent revelation of the sufferings in less favoured sectors, which were far more numerous than was believed.

The Fifth Army, although life in it was not so idyllic as the report suggested, was in particularly favourable circumstances. The quiet which it had enjoyed for some months had allowed of work being carried out; the nature of the subsoil, a porous chalk, assured fairly rapid draining and allowed of the construction of dug-outs. But in Picardy, Artois, Belgium, Champagne, and the Woevre circumstances did not permit such measures. Further, although on paper the orders for stoves,

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lamps, and wire mattresses looked well, the Supply Branch declared that of the 200,000 beds ordered, hardly 50,000 had been delivered; and of 300,000 stoves, 150,000 were deficient; and other things in proportion. It was the fault of the makers, the War Office, the Treasury. . . . But what a dangerous mistake, among all the reports, to publish that which gave the rosier view of the situation, and to slur over mistakes and deficiencies!

The methods of official propaganda were in fact of little use. The other method used to counter the troops' sullenness was to send the "worse" units into the line more often than those that still seemed to have the offensive spirit. The "rolling" of divisions, brigades or battalions into the front line and back to rest was organized in such a way that the "worse" units were either physically used up, or used to hold the line while other favoured units trained for "real war". This was done once too often. At the beginning of June a battalion ordered to march from rest billets towards the Front refused to do so.

It is extraordinary how little happened then, and yet how much. The mutinies spread "as if by sympathetic subterranean electricity". No less than sixteen army corps were involved. Yet not a single case of bloodshed is reported. The mutinies, one might say, went off without any "incidents".

It is extraordinary, too, how little has been written about them. Particularly extraordinary in Britain,

for the French mutinies of 1917 became later one of the main factors in the defence made by Haig and his admirers to Lloyd George's accusations, which are not only Lloyd George's, on Passchendaele. These accusations can be summarized: Haig at Passchendaele, on unsuitable ground in beastly weather, threw away and wore out the fighting strength of the British Army in the late summer and autumn of 1917 by unsuccessful offensive after offensive. The reply of Haig's admirers is that it was necessary to keep the initiative, to keep on attacking, first because the Admiralty wanted the Flanders coast cleared, and secondly because the French were so weakened by mutinies that the Germans must be prevented from putting any pressure on them. These mutinies have therefore some interest for those engaged in the Great War to determine who muddled the Great War; yet the contestants have never troubled to analyse the events in the French Army or determine their quality.

When Nivelle's offensive failed to produce a break-through on April 16th and 17th—days of snow-flurries and cold rain—the disorder within the lines of the attacking armies became indescribable. Stores, guns, and battalions had been piled into a narrow strip of ground behind the trenches, in expectation of swift advance; little or no shelter had been provided, because it was hoped that the German artillery would soon be captured or forced to retire. One of Nivelle's documents had pointed

out that the Germans, during an attack, concentrated their artillery on the old French front line and on trenches captured by the attacking troops; they did not shell heavily the ground immediately behind the old French front line; therefore, Nivelle argued, guns and stores and men could be accumulated in this strip of ground without any need to dig gun-pits or shelter-trenches. As this document had fallen into German hands the German artillery were able to make a shambles of the area where the French troops were massed for the breakthrough.

Nivelle persisted. His plans in ruins and his finest troops pounded into the reddened earth, he drove division after division into new attacks, almost as futile and disastrous as the first. Divisions were not relieved; they died, and new divisions poured through them, until Craonne and the Chemin des Dames were won—a few miles of shell-scarred land. Nivelle did not call a halt until the troops began to crack: on the front of the Sixth Army, commanded by General Mangin (who was called “the butcher” by his men) a few companies that had been ten days in the hell of the battle refused to go over the top for a new attack. Three days later Nivelle was replaced by Pétain.

In Paris, for the first time during the war, there was a May Day demonstration: a “Committee for the renewal of international relations” brought 10,000 people to a meeting, and many went on to

demonstrate, in spite of a police ban, in the *Place de la République*. Leaflets were scattered: the day of universal deliverance was approaching—no more blood ought to be shed—delegates of workers and soldiers ought to be elected—"down with the regime of massacre!" The General Staff and many politicians later attributed the mutinies of May and June to the work of these "unscrupulous agitators". As Jean de Pierrefeu writes:

G.Q.C. immediately attributed the discontent of the Army to the agitators and their leaflets and brochures. . . . Every time that the troops showed a common state of mind, attempts were made to discover who was inspiring it. They (the Staff) seemed to overlook the fact that ideas and opinions can arise spontaneously in minds and hearts in the face of certain events.¹

On May 3rd the 21st Division of Colonial Infantry "struck". They were "recalled to their duty" by their own officers, and ringleaders were severely punished. A new offensive began on May 5th, which Painlevé (then Minister for War) later admitted was undertaken only in order to "save the face" of Nivelle,² who could not be fully replaced by Pétain till he had won a *succes d'estime*. The 21st Division was flung into this offensive and came out of it shattered.

On the 19th May the 120th infantry regiment refused to leave rest billets and move up to the

¹ *French Headquarters*, p. 175.

² *Revue de Paris*, 15th January, 1922.

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front. The 128th infantry were ordered next day to march instead of the mutineers, and refused. Little groups formed round soldiers who shouted "we'll not go up the line again!" Meetings were improvised. The more moderate speakers were bitter about the incapacity of generals and ministers; the bolder spirits spoke of ending the war, of the Russian revolution, of Soviets. On the 21st the men of the two regiments barricaded themselves, armed, in a series of earthworks. There they stayed for three days, trying to bargain with the officers sent to talk to them. They made no attempt to get in touch with other units, or Paris; they did not raid for food, though they were soon hungry; they waited, and then surrendered.

During the last week of May and the first two weeks of June mutinies of this sort broke out everywhere. Battalions had to be disarmed; some were sent back to their depots and split up among other units.. Whole divisions were withdrawn from the armies and marched into the central provinces of France.

At Soissons, the nearest point of the front to Paris, two battalions marched on the railway station and got hold of a railway engine: they declared that they were going to go to Paris "to throw out of the Palais Bourbon (the Parliament building) the gabblers who are ordering us to be massacred". Some sharp fighting took place in the railway station before loyal troops, Senegalese and

officers, were able to stop them. Other battalions seized lorries, and roads had to be barricaded against them.

In some cases officers were shut up in their billets by mutineers; in other cases they were told to go home. Many of the men themselves went home as soon as the wave of mutinies reached their units. The official number of desertions in the French Army, which had been only 509 in 1914, totalled 21,174 in 1917.¹ Liddell Hart says: "so general was the rot that, according to the Minister for War, only two divisions in the Champagne sector could be relied on fully, and in places the trenches were scarcely even guarded." A total of either sixteen or seventeen army corps were involved, partially or wholly, in these mutinies—a larger force than Napoleon had at Waterloo. Yet the only bloodshed reported was when officers tried to subdue the wavering troops with their revolvers, and even then few officers were killed.

The repression of the mutinies was a different matter. Over a hundred and fifty death sentences were passed between the 10th of May and the 10th of June. Only twenty-three of these, it was officially announced later, were carried out. But while the number of those executed by normal process was not large, other methods were also used. Henri Barbusse has told the story of one incident, insisting that it was only one out of many, and that it did

¹ Liddell Hart, *A History of the World War*, London, 1934, p. 292.

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actually occur.¹ Several battalions had mutinied, near Soissons, had taken their own officers prisoners—and then had been surrounded and disarmed. Two hundred and fifty were chosen at random, taken in motor lorries round and about till they did not know where they were, and then marched under escort to a quiet part of the front. They were told to wait, at a point beyond the front line trenches—they did not know that they were in no-man's-land. The escort was withdrawn, and the French artillery began to hammer, to pulp into the earth, these two hundred and fifty men. Steel and high explosive and the hailing shrapnel came first, German machine-guns woke as their sentries reported a raid, then French machine-guns, rifles, even bayonets, finished the tragedy. The men in the French front line trenches never knew that they had been firing on Frenchmen. Only the picked, threatened escort knew what had happened, and the officers. It was kept secret: the aim was not terror, not the effect of an example, but the actual extermination of men who had dared to mutiny. And in France and in Salonica, where many of the "worst" divisions were sent, extermination continued in a haphazard, accidental way, divisions or battalions that were listed as unreliable being given the hotter parts of the line, or the fever-trenches near the lakes in Macedonia.

¹ Henri Barbusse, *Thus and Thus*, English translation, London, 1929. See p. 77 *et seq.* in 1932 edition.

It might be hard to believe this story of the two hundred and fifty men if we did not know the admitted and greater tragedy of the Russian brigades in France. These brigades grew out of small units of Russian volunteers drawn from the Russian colonies in Paris and Marseilles; they were reinforced by volunteers selected in the Tsarist army and despatched to France, following agreement by Paleologue the French Ambassador and Sazonov the Tsar's Foreign Minister; they were a sort of "return freight" for the ships that carried French munitions and supplies to Archangel, Murmansk, and Vladivostock.

Plenty of men had volunteered: only 15 per cent of the applicants had been chosen. They had heard that there was no flogging in the French Army, that officers and N.C.O.s were not allowed to strike their men, that there might even be a rifle for each man in the ranks and plenty of ammunition—incredible stories, that they probably discounted, but attractive enough to bring in nearly a quarter of a million volunteers. The agreement had been that Russia should "export" 40,000 infantry per month, but the Tsarist Government was as ineffective in its crimes as in its other actions (if any). Less than 40,000 sailed in all, perhaps less than 30,000. The first small units were gradually reinforced with these, during 1916, until they formed two very strong brigades; they were not grouped into a division because the French command thought little

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of their fighting capacity, and preferred to brigade them with French troops—as they usually did with the Senegalese.

By the spring of 1917 these conscript volunteers were already disappointed: flogging and brutalities had been introduced, after a few months: "Russian soldiers only understand that language." Unrest began; a paper called *Nashe Slovo* (Our Word) was printed in Russian in Paris and copies of it reached the brigades; it protested against the abuses of which the men complained. The Russian command decided to employ Tsarism's usual methods: to send into the ranks *agents provocateurs*, who would lead the men into some sort of riot; then severe punishment could be inflicted, an example made. A man called Vining, from the Russian Embassy in Paris, seems to have done his work too well: a Colonel Krause was set on and stoned to death. Eight men were shot for this, *Nashe Slovo* suppressed. An almost unknown journalist called Leon Trotsky, who had helped to run the paper, was expelled from France.

Great efforts were made to keep the news of the Russian revolution away from this grey-coated infantry who sang their plaintive folksongs under alien and unfriendly skies. These efforts failed, of course. Painlevé writes:

It had not been possible to leave the Russian brigades in ignorance of the new military regime in their own country (which took from the officers the right to give

punishments and made them submit to election). . . . The example that these soldiers gave in their Soviets, their deliberations, their attitude towards their officers, demoralized the French troops alongside them and repercussions of this were felt on the whole front. The only remedy was to transfer them to the interior of the country.¹

Men of the 1st Russian Battalion, meeting in the cellar of a glass-works near the front, decided late in March to discuss things with delegates from other regiments. From the long speeches and the muddled pathetic questions and interjections one thing stood out solidly: "we want to go back to Russia!" That was, in fact, the only demand of the Russian brigades, throughout the mutiny. A deputation was appointed to inform the battalion commander, Colonel Netchvolodov—who fainted on the spot, falling down in the black mud outside his orderly-room; the delegates had to pick him up and carry him indoors.

There was, at this time, no attempt at active mutiny by these men; they were simply stating a request. A few days later the 1st Brigade was moved into the Fifth Army area, among troops gathering for the offensive. The Russians knew that there was to be a great attack; everyone in France knew it. They discussed whether they would take part in it, and decided to do so; they marched in fours to the shambles. They went over the top towards Fort

¹ *Revue de Paris*. 15th January, 1922.

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Brimont, a strong-point dominating the right of the Fifth Army's line. The fort had been built by the French to cover Reims, and now was the corner-buttress of the German defence.

This fort, with its deep concrete redoubts, was almost impregnable; Nivelles's plan had been to out-flank it from the north after the break-through. No break-through happened: the French troops did not even get to Bermericourt, north-west of the fort. The Russian brigade, nine thousand strong—the strength of a weak division—had to go up-hill, in full view of the fort's defenders, for two and a half miles. They crossed the deep canal that joins the Vesle and Aisne rivers; in repeated attacks, day after day they penetrated twenty-six lines of barbed-wire defences. When they got to the earth-covered slopes of the fort itself they had lost nearly six thousand killed and wounded, and the exhausted remnants had to fall back a few hundred yards. "They were used by the French in a ruthless manner," Winston Churchill writes.¹ Their own generals could scarcely have been more brutal.

They did not, yet, mutiny. They only set up a stronger organization of delegates and committees, and openly called these their Soviets. But French troops began to mutiny, as we have told, and the Minister for War decided that the example of the Russians was harmful; they must be sent to the interior. Both brigades, about 15,000 strong, were

¹ *The World Crisis, 1916-18*, p. 285.

marched and carried over two hundred miles south from Paris, to the hill department of Creuse. There in a camp of huts near the little town of La Courtine they were left to do nothing—without officers, for the officers did not like their democratic manners, and went off to Limoges—until the French mutinies were suppressed.

At this camp we must leave the Russian brigades, for a little while, to note some of the results of the French mutinies. For the tragedy of these Russians, revealing in its blackness, making credible other stories of repressive savagery, did not reach its second act until the French mutinies were over; the third act dragged out for nearly three years.

The French mutinies were suppressed by shootings and by reforms. Repression alone would have failed; repression was combined with great changes throughout the whole army, in the conditions of the men. Leave was given widely and regularly: camps for leave men, near Paris and other cities were made, to accommodate those who did not want to travel to their native villages and could not afford to stay in the cities. Rations were improved, and camps, and billets. Pétain travelled by car from division to division, talking to officers and men; he impressed on all the feeling that the French armies were now in the hands of a man who would be just and careful. And Pétain was careful, not only of the lives of his men but of their ideas. He shut the armies off from newspapers, from politicians, from trade union-

ists, and above all from strikers—as well as shutting them off from the German machine-guns.

It is impossible to say what effect the strikes of 1917 had on the mutinies. Metal workers struck early in the year, in St. Denis and other suburbs of Paris, in the Panhard factories, and at Aubervilliers. After the Russian revolution there were fewer strikes, but these had a political tinge to them, and demands for the ending of the war began to be raised at strike meetings. The strikes spread beyond those who normally take such action. Bank clerks came out, and the *midinettes* of Paris—who are not the gartered gaities pictured in *La Vie Parisienne*, but young women not unlike their sisters in the East End of London, who earn very little for making very many garments—the *midinettes* carried out a general strike that lasted for some time. During the mutinies there were strikes in Paris, on the Loire, and at St. Etienne. Pétain saw to it that the strikers did not infect the army. No less than 1280 persons were arrested at Paris stations as “suspects” and “agitators” during the period of the mutinies and their suppression. Many little journals and little printers felt the weight of the Government’s hand. Loyal troops and Senegalese were put at the disposal of the prefects in each town or province where strikes occurred. By June 15th the mutinies were over; by June 30th the strikes had been settled.

The mutinies had won many small reforms but these scarcely counted alongside the one big gain:

the offensives were ended. For over a year, from May 1917 to June 1918, the French Army undertook no more great attacks. Pétain held on; raids and small offensives were staged; but there were no more of the terrible and futile attacks against unbroken defences and unbreakable machine-gunners. The mutinies, because they were entirely leaderless, and got no active organizing support from the Paris working class, did nothing to end the war. The German Navy was in open mutiny at the same time, Russia was in full tide of revolution and appealing for a peace without annexations, there was the chance that such a peace could be imposed on the Governments. But the failure of the French mutinies and the unbroken obedience of the British and German armies destroyed that chance.

The return of the French troops to order and discipline also destroyed any chance there may have been for the return to Russia of the luckless Russian brigades at La Courtine. The generals of the Tsarist Army and the "Commissar" sent from Petrograd by Kerensky's Government failed to persuade them to give up their one simple demand, to go home. Failure also attended the persuasive efforts of "several distinguished former exiles". An official report of the Provisional Government then in power in Russia—Kerensky's Government—describes these soldiers as "rebels", but in fact they were doing nothing except putting forward this one demand. On June 25th General Zankievitch ordered all

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soldiers loyal to Kerensky's Government to leave camp. "There remained at the camp", says the Government report, "only the soldiers who said they would submit conditionally to the Provisional Government."¹ "Submitting conditionally" meant that they would submit if the Government would promise to consider their one demand. Apparently only a few hundred at that time left the camp and gave up their request.

Then Commissar Rapp tried his hand, ordering the men to march to another village; "the order was only partially obeyed; first 500 men went out, of whom twenty-two were arrested; twenty-four hours later about 6000 followed."

It was decided to increase the pressure; their rations were diminished, their pay was cut off, and the roads towards the village of Courtine were guarded by French soldiers. General Zankievitch, having discovered that a Russian artillery brigade was passing through France, decided to form a mixed detachment of infantry and artillery to reduce the rebels. A deputation was sent to the rebels; the deputation returned several hours later, convinced of the futility of the negotiations. On September 1st, General Zankievitch sent an ultimatum to the rebels demanding that they lay down their arms, and menacing in case of refusal to open fire with artillery if the order was not obeyed by September 3rd at 10 o'clock.

The order not being executed, a light fire of artillery was opened on the place at the hour agreed upon.

¹ John Reed: *Ten Days that Shook the World*, appendix to Chapter II, section 7.

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Eighteen shells were fired, and the rebels were warned that the bombardment would become more intense. In the night of September 3rd 160 men surrendered. September 4th the artillery bombardment recommenced and at 11 o'clock, after 36 shells had been fired, the rebels raised two white flags and began to leave the camp without arms. By evening 8300 men had surrendered; 150 men who remained in the camp opened fire with machine-guns that night. The 5th of September, to make an end to the affair, a heavy barrage was laid on the camp and our soldiers occupied it little by little. The rebels kept up a heavy fire with their machine-guns. September 6th, at 9 o'clock the camp was entirely occupied . . . after the disarmament of the rebels 81 arrests were made.

John Reed, the American journalist, who quotes this report, was later permitted by the Bolshevik Government to inspect the secret files dealing with this incident in the Petrograd Ministry for Foreign Affairs. He states that the report is not "strictly accurate", and that "all attempts to find out the name of the Russian artillery brigade which had fired on them were futile; the telegrams discovered in the Ministry left it to be inferred that French artillery was used. . . .

"After their surrender more than 200 of the mutineers were shot in cold blood."

French guns were in fact used, but the gunners seem to have been loyal Russians. The operations were carried out with considerable forces. There were 11,000 "rebels". Ringed round them were

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troops in two concentric lines, the inner line Russian, the outer line French. Russian troops of the inner line, three battalions of infantry, three companies of machine-guns, and four battalions of artillery, were forced by their own officers and by the grim ring of French bayonets behind them to carry the attack on the camp. The French troops were the 19th, 78th, 82nd and 105th Regiments of the line, with cavalry and guns.

Time had been wasted waiting for Commissar Rapp and listening to his speeches. The civilians were evacuated from La Courtine. A last ultimatum was sent. It was rejected by a meeting of the 11,000 which began at eight a.m. At ten the Russian soldiers' band was playing. And shells fell on their meeting-place.

The attack lasted two days, according to the Government, five days according to the survivors now in Russia. Until the second day no resistance was attempted. Then the 8000 surrendered, the 3000 fought, using machine-guns. Of the 3000, several hundred were killed, 800 were said to be missing, many hundreds were wounded. There were few survivors.

The eight thousand who surrendered, with the six thousand who had decided earlier to obey and had been given the job of shelling their comrades, were sent to Africa. More thousands were added from the Russian brigades in Salonica, who were also demanding their return to Russia. Henri

Barbusse met there, years later, some of those who endured the years in Africa, where "they melted down. They were dragged from camp to camp, from inferno to inferno. Every living day was a sorrowful station in the passion of these exiled revolutionaries. . . .

"At last it was decided", wrote Barbusse, with whose words we can end the story of this tragedy, "to bring these Russian soldiers home. But their return, which might have been thought to end their tribulation, was only the beginning of another. For they were sent back to Russia to be enrolled in the army of that white outlaw, Denikin, who was paid and equipped by France and England to shatter the Government of the peasants and workers. But 'No!' they said, 'we will not.' Then they were decimated; scenes yet more horrible and more ferocious marked this stage in that living tragedy. Their numbers visibly dwindled away. And how many times was that scene re-enacted—men concealing the traces of freshly made graves! Their numbers dwindled away. . . . Never mind; to the last they were as one single man.

"But now historical events intervened in the dark story and made the great amendment. Denikin was beaten by the revolution. The workers of Toula set up such furious barriers that Denikin recoiled, fled to the shores of the Black Sea, and farther than that, to Paris.

"And now at last the little throng of Russian

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soldiers have triumphed over events. At last they have become true soldiers of the revolution. They have encompassed that definite thing which they saw in their dreams when they refused to serve the ends of those who massacre the peoples. Their unshakable determination at last has won the right. Never, in all the history of mankind, was promise more splendidly kept by a band of men both greater and more human than their fellows."

CHAPTER SIX

WORLD SPRING



“THE St. Petersburg soldiers want better food, better clothing, better living quarters, better pay, the reduction of the period of military service and of the daily exercises. But other demands, which can only be presented by a citizen-soldier, occupy a still more important place on the list. The right to attend in uniform all meetings ‘the same as other citizens’, the right to read and keep in the barracks *all* newspapers, freedom of conscience, equal rights for all nationalities, complete abolition of saluting outside of barracks, the abolition of officers’ orderlies, the abolition of courts-martial, the right to defend oneself against the slightest attempt of a superior to strike a blow. Such are the principal demands of the St. Petersburg soldiers.”

Lenin wrote these words in December 1905¹—not in 1917—and we begin our account of the Russian mutinies with this quotation from the leader of the Russian revolution because it is impossible to

¹ *Novaya Zhizn* (New Life) dated 12th December, 1905; this was the Bolsheviks’ legal daily.

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disentangle the mutinies from that revolution, of which they were an integral part. A week before the printing of the soldiers' manifesto that Lenin was summarizing the sailors had mutinied in Kronstadt; then there had begun, for the second time that year, a mutiny in the Black Sea Fleet. But these and other mutinies were not isolated from the revolutionary outbreaks of the working class and part of the peasantry: they were a part of the movement which led from the Petersburg general strike of October to the Moscow insurrection of December 1905.

The Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917 are events too large in scale and too far-reaching in outcome to be crowded into a chapter of this book; we can give only the barest outline of some of the events surrounding these mutinies, events that were their causes and their consequences; but this outline is thereby necessarily incomplete, since the strikes, the peasant revolts, the formation of new parties, the emergence into daylight of parties working secretly under the crumbling surface of Tsarism—these things were the lifeblood of the mutinies, and in these things the reasons for their outbreak and their suppression are to be found.

Tsarism in 1905 was weakened by defeat in the Russo-Japanese war. The year opened with news of the surrender of Port Arthur and with the massacre of two hundred people outside the Tsar's palace on the "Bloody Sunday" of January 9th (in the old calendar). Led by a priest, carrying ikons, they

had come to plead; they knelt in the snow; they were charged and sabred by regiments of cossacks.

In May, after the battle of Tsushima, at which Russia's final defeat was made certain by the destruction of the Tsar's strongest battle-fleet, a general strike was proclaimed in Ivanovo-Vossnesensk, and the first Soviet of Workers' delegates appeared as an enlarged strike committee, a "council of action". In June there was fighting at Lodz, in Poland, and five hundred were killed. In the Caucasus, on the Black Sea at Odessa, at Libau on the Baltic, there were clashes between demonstrators and soldiers—the police could no longer "maintain order" (i.e. prevent all working class meetings and demonstrations). There was a continual, mounting wave of strikes: in 1905 there were more people on strike in Russia than in France and Germany together during the two previous years. In the one month of January 1905 the number of strikers was greater than that of the whole of the previous two years in Russia. Troops were used, as a matter of course, to break the strikes. They were used too often.

The role of henchmen of the police [wrote Lenin] could not fail gradually to open the eyes of even the Tsar's troops. The army began to waver. At first isolated cases of insubordination, outbreaks among the reservists, protests of the officers, agitation among the soldiers, refusal of certain companies or regiments to shoot at their own brothers, the workers. Then the passing of certain units to the side of the uprising.¹

¹ *Proletary*, No. 7, July 1905.

In the army itself there were, by July 1905, many who wavered, but very few who went over to the side of the uprising. The units to which Lenin referred in his last sentence were crews in the Black Sea.

The story of the armoured cruiser *Potemkin* is known to many who have seen the film, one of the most remarkable ever made, in which the movement of the men in revolt and the movement of the sea are wedded and contrasted so that the elemental force of each is clearly seen. The most powerful warship in the Black Sea, the *Prince Potemkin of Tauris* (12,500 tons) was first of its squadron to reach a cruising-ground where battle-practice, with live ammunition, was to take place. The crews of the Black Sea Fleet were riddled with revolutionary committees, but this vessel, which could blow any of the others out of the water, had the "strongest" officers and the rawest crew, both carefully selected. The revolutionary committee on the *Potemkin* was therefore not a solid body with a sprinkling of Social-Democrats in it, as were the committees on some other ships, but a wordy group of Socialist Revolutionaries, members of the peasant party. They struck too soon, before the rest of the fleet was ready. But their blow told and echoed.

The meat was maggoty. This was no new thing; meat was bought for the crews by one of the officers, and officers of the Tsar's navy had a divine right to make money in this way. The men refused to eat

soup made from this filth. The ship's doctor certified the food was good, and the captain decided to enforce discipline. Those who had refused, and many who had not, were lined up on the foredeck, lectured shortly, and then thirty of them were picked out, almost at random, and lined up by the bulwarks to be shot. The guard lifted their rifles—and refused to fire. The thirty rushed towards the battery-deck, where was the entry to the crews' quarters, where also rifles and ammunition were stored. Officers lost their heads and fired wildly; one man was killed. This was the signal for the whole crew to cut loose: they threw overboard the group of officers who had begun to use their revolvers. The *Potemkin* was in their hands.

They did not know how to navigate it; an ensign was "elected commander"; but they knew their goal, Odessa. There the workers were on strike, the town was on the edge of revolt. Barricades had appeared. The arrival of the *Potemkin*, the funeral of the sailor shot by one of the officers, let loose the insurrection. Odessa was for a time "in the hands of the mob". The authorities played for time, waiting for artillery and waiting for the approach of loyal vessels. The crew of the *Potemkin* had little idea what to do; a few shells were dropped, almost apologetically, near but not too near the Government buildings, where police and officers held out. On board the cruiser life was one long political meeting: speeches two hours long were made: but

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there was no leadership in action. Then warships came in sight, and the crew were faced with clear need for bold action; the *Potemkin* went out to meet the admiral and his squadron. And the admiral turned about, fled. He called for reinforcements; every available vessel had to be scraped out of every port in the Black Sea before he would brave this cruiser and this crew. A little later, reinforced, he returned and the *Potemkin* sailed again to the south, prepared for action. The admiral ordered his crews to battle stations. And then his crews broke away, lined the sides of his ships, cheered the cruiser swinging towards them. The officers could do nothing but head for open sea again. The *Potemkin* returned to Odessa, not pursuing. It was joined by a torpedo boat, the 267, a small cruiser, the *St. George*, and a military transport, the *Vecha* (even unarmoured coasting vessels had been brought into his squadron by the panic-sick admiral).

"Fine doings in the Black Sea," wrote Tsar Nicholas in his private diary. The admiral commanding in the Black Sea reported "I am afraid the sea is controlled by the rebels and I have decided not to come out."

But the rebels used their sea-power only to hold meetings, and the *St. George* was run aground by its officers; the crew surrendered. The authorities resumed the offensive; strikers were massacred in Odessa, and the *Potemkin's* men could not decide to use their big guns against the Government's

forces ashore. The strike collapsed. The *Potemkin*, short of food and coal—the crew had scarcely thought of these things during the five days that all stores were open to them—crossed the Black Sea to the Rumanian coast, but were refused supplies. The ship swung back to the Crimea, and food was obtained, but no coal. The Tsar Nicholas wrote in his diary: “The commanders will have to be punished severely and the mutineers cruelly.”

Slowly, using its last reserves of coal, the ship crossed the dark sea once more. And on June 21st, the Tsar wrote in his diary: “The *Potemkin* has again called at Constantza where the crew surrendered to the Rumanian authorities and were landed.”

There were about fifty of the crew still on board when a Russian squadron sailed in cautiously to tow the *Potemkin* back to Odessa. These fifty had decided to throw themselves on the mercy of the authorities. They were court-martialled, with the crew of the torpedo boat 267. Three were shot, nineteen sent to Siberia, thirty-three imprisoned. Sixty-seven men of the *St. George* were shot or sent to penal servitude. And two years later, after a general amnesty had been pronounced, seaman Matyushenko, one of the leaders on the *Potemkin*, came back to Russia from Rumania; he was hanged at once. Tsarism found it hard to forget the *Potemkin*; even the name of the ship was changed, to wipe out the memory of those June days.

From June to October the storm throughout

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Russia darkened menacing, but events lagged, and the Tsar had time to end the war before the beginning of the great strikes in Moscow and Petersburg, the railway strike throughout Russia and the peasant rising against the gentry, 2000 of whose country houses were wrecked in the last quarter of the year. On October 13th, 1905, the Petersburg Soviet was formed; on October 17th the Tsar promised a constitution, of a sort. On the 26th, Kronstadt mutinied. The beginning of November saw a general strike in Petersburg to prevent the execution of leaders of the Kronstadt mutiny, which had been almost without organization and needed only a few regiments of guards to break it. An amnesty of a sort was forced, and stumbling out of the black fortress of Schusselburg came not only some of the sailors' leaders but also some of the survivors of Russia's revolutionary past, members of the "People's Will" party, the *Narodnaya Volya*, who had not seen full daylight for twenty years—old men "white for bliss and blind for sun and stunned for liberty".

Then in the south the men who had cheered the *Potemkin*, now more fully organized, followed its example. Meetings in Sevastopol were "out of bounds" for the sailors, so they began to organize their own meetings in the open air, and workers and peasants flocked to these. One morning, November 24th by our calendar, the local rear-admiral posted a company of sailors at the gates of the naval barracks and himself gave the order:

"Let no one leave the barracks: in case of disobedience, shoot!" A sailor called Petrov at once stepped out of the ranks, loaded his rifle, and shot dead the military officer present, a lieutenant-colonel; then he winged the admiral. No sailors moved when his arrest was ordered: he threw his rifle on the ground; officers arrested him; the sailors broke rank protesting; he must be released; they vouched for him.

"Petrov, the shot was an accident, wasn't it?" muttered an officer, looking for a way out.

"What do you mean, an accident? I stepped forward, loaded, took aim. Is that an accident?"

"Well, but they are demanding your release . . ."

He was released and the officers were arrested. From those two shots the movement spread to street demonstrations: the sailors carried red flags and yet marched to the tune of "God Save the Tsar". They knew nothing of what to do next. They asked for the release of soldiers and sailors in prison for their politics, "more respectful treatment", a constituent assembly, etc. Eleven warships in the harbour joined in the movement, and leadership was given to an ex-lieutenant, Schmidt, who had been thrown out of the navy for talking politics. He hoisted the flag of an admiral commanding-in-chief on the cruiser *Ochakov*, under a red flag, and then hoisted the signal: "I assume command of the fleet, Schmidt." He wired to the Tsar: "The gallant Black Sea Fleet, sacredly preserving

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loyalty to the people,¹ demands from you, Sire, the immediate convocation of a constituent assembly and ceases to obey your ministers: Commander of the Fleet, Citizen Schmidt." But this leader was less vigorous than he seemed, a dreamer who did nothing to get his command ready for action, and officers were able to remove breech-blocks from the guns or flood the ammunition holds. The forts and loyal ships then attacked the mutineers: the *Ochakov* could only fire six shells, and was ablaze in a few minutes. Schmidt swam for the shore, was picked up; he was shot, with three seamen. Rebels in the barracks were crushed by infantry and artillery.

The mutiny was ended, the struggle was weakening in St. Petersburg, where the influence of Mensheviks and other moderates was directed against any attempt at insurrection. In that capital they were in the majority, but in Moscow the Bolsheviks were stronger. A conference of delegates from nine Grenadier regiments was held in a Moscow textile mill in October. In November the police found that a revolutionary organization had been formed within the Sappers 1st Reserve Battalion. In December the Rostov regiment of infantry mutinied: it was the day on which the Government, recovering the initiative, arrested the Petersburg Soviet. The Moscow workers were not ready to act when the

¹ This phrase is, according to Pokrovsky's *Brief History of Russia* (Vol. II, p. 175) "mindful of its traditions and of its devotion to the Tsar"; we quote the translation given by the editor of Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p. 584.

Rostov soldiers revolted; the workers' insurrection did not come until the mutiny was over. The insurrection, lasting several days, was wiped out because it had no military support. From that point Tsarism triumphed, until 1917.

It will be seen that the Russian Navy played a considerable part in 1905's "rehearsal for the Revolution". In a later chapter we point out the close connection between modern navies and the industrial working class, the class that led the strikes and insurrections of 1905 and 1917. But in 1905 the sailors of the Black Sea Fleet were not predominantly working class in origin; four-fifths were peasants. Most of them came from villages along the big rivers: they were often peasants who had worked on the river-boats or in the fisheries, who had seen something of the world outside their own fields: they were descendants of the peasants who fought for Pugachev in his rising against Catherine the Great, which still lingers in Russian memories and songs. But the indecision of the mutineers, their lack of organization, may have been partly due to their peasant origin: the small producer, isolated in his work and life, finds organization and collective action less easy than does the town worker.

In 1917 the number of industrial workers in the navy had greatly increased. Kronstadt, the naval base outside Petrograd, had been flooded with recruits from the Petrograd factories. And throughout the two revolutions of 1917 the sailors from

Kronstadt were continually reinforcing the revolutionaries, continually taking the lead.

Tsarism began to crumble early in the Great War: in 1915 the Conservative President of the Duma (equivalent in his position to the Speaker in the House of Commons) said to members of the Tsar's Government "you possess neither system, nor knowledge, nor organization. For all these you substitute police measures."¹ By 1916 the rot had gone so far within the imperial family itself that the Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna, aunt of the Tsar Nicholas proposed to the President of the Duma that the Tsarina should "be eliminated", should "disappear". Rasputin reigned—the "holy devil" who could so impress even the daughter of the British Ambassador that, seeing him across the street, she felt: "under the gaze of those strange compelling eyes, I had been assailed by such a strange sensation of helplessness and weakness".² Rasputin was murdered and the Tsar banished the nobles who murdered him. But while the corruption and intrigue and mystic follies of the Tsar's court were thus leading to assassination and to the talk of a Palace revolution, the ordinary people of Russia were working, starving, dying, with a darkening future before them.

The British Ambassador wrote home in 1916: "If there is trouble the troops, I am told, will refuse

¹ Rodzianko: *La Règne de Rasputine*, Paris, 1928, p. 229.

² Meriel Buchanan: *The Dissolution of an Empire*, London, 1932, p. 139.

to fire. The trouble, if it comes, will be due to economic reasons and it will begin, not with the workmen in the factories but with the crowds waiting in the cold and snow outside the provision shops."¹

He received his information from factory owners, or from their parliamentary representatives, who thought that the workers must be contented because wages had been advanced, disregarding the much greater advance of prices. In fact the February revolution began with strikes in Petrograd, where a quarter of a million workers came out. But its development into revolution was largely the work of those who waited, particularly the women who waited, in the growing queues in the snowy streets. And even before these strikes the peasants in the armies had begun to revolt. At a conference of army commanders held on the 17th and 18th December, 1916, General Russki, commanding the northern group of armies said: "Riga and Dvinsk, but particularly Riga, are the weak spots on the northern front; they are two nests of insurrection". And General Brusilov added: "The 7th Siberian Army Corps came out of Riga in a perfectly miserable condition, the men refusing to advance to the attack. Even mutinies occurred. A company commander was killed. Strong measures had to be taken, several men were shot and the commanders were removed."

¹ *The Dissolution of an Empire*, p. 155.

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The appalling mismanagement of the war behind the front and at the front roused against Tsarism not only the peasant soldiers sent half armed to the shambles, but also many officers, "patriots", many of the middle classes. Even the officer in the tsarist army could realize the brutal incapacity of the general commanding him. Even a peasant straight from the fields, believing in the Little Father and in Holy Russia, could see that it was useless sacrifice to march in line, with scarcely any artillery support, against barbed-wire and machine-guns and the German shells. Yet this was the sum total of the military skill of the Tsar's generals. "Sometimes", wrote Hindenburg, "in our battles with the Russians we had to remove the mounds of enemy corpses from before our trenches in order to get a clear field of fire against fresh assaulting waves."¹

Out of every hundred casualties in the German or French armies about thirty were killed and seventy were wounded: in the Russian army about thirty-five were killed and sixty-five wounded. Shells were not more murderous on the Russian front nor did Russian peasants die more easily from bullet wounds than the French or German soldiers. These five more dead in each hundred casualties died because their wounds were neglected. Rodzianko describes a visit to the southern front:

The road was cluttered with innumerable processions

¹ Von Hindenburg: *Out of My Life*, second edition, p. 200.

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of wounded in carts. Many with serious head wounds had not even straw to lie on, and their moans were heartrending . . . at Rojitchi we were struck by the number of wounded lying in all sorts of places: in houses, in gardens, on the ground and in barns. . . .

Wounded came back to Petrograd, travelling hundreds of miles, without attention. Meriel Buchanan writes:

At the beginning of the War the military transport service was found to be hopelessly inadequate, the jealousy existing between the Ministry of War and the organization of the Red Cross being so acute that they refused to work together, the result being a state of indescribable confusion. In some cases soldiers were allowed to lie for days on the bare boards of railway trucks or goods wagons with their wounds not dressed or attended to, while a few miles away a perfectly equipped hospital train stood empty with the doctors and nurses chafing impatiently at their enforced inactivity. Some of the soldiers who arrived at our hospital straight from the front were in a terrible condition, not having had any food or attention for days. . . .¹

We have quoted witnesses who were very distinctly not revolutionaries; they represent a section of Russian society and of the influences working upon it that helped somewhat to bring about the revolution. In Russia the conservative bourgeoisie and the ambassadors and other representatives of the allied countries neither believed in nor endeavoured to carry out an overthrow of Tsarism,

¹ *The Dissolution of an Empire*, p. 124.

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but in fact they did help towards this overthrow by refusing to support the Tsar and his ministers. But the fighting needed to achieve this overthrow had to be done by the working classes, and a mutiny of Cossack troops, spreading to other units, ended Tsarism.

The "February" revolution¹ began with strikes and unarmed demonstrations. By March 8th Cossack cavalry were riding down the main streets of Petrograd scattering the little meetings that reappeared at street corners over and over again, breaking up the groups of marchers, snatching at the ominous hand-made banners that they carried: "Down with autocracy!" and "Down with war!" Let one of the strikers, V. Kajurov, from the Erikson factory, tell the story.

On March 9th about 70,000 workers from his factory and others near it flooded a narrow street, trying to get over one of the bridges that separate the factory suburbs from the centre of Petrograd. A hundred yards from the bridge they were held up by a line of Cossacks.

The situation was uncanny. . . . If the Cossacks came at us there could be no escape. All eyes were fixed on one spot. New processions were continually piling in. Then the officer's word of command rang out; the Cossacks rode forward with drawn swords.

Our hearts were gripped by horror: there was no hope of escape from the crowded street, no hope of

¹ February in the old calendar, March in ours.

defence. The officers flung themselves into the crowd, forcing a way through with their horses; behind them we could see the Cossacks charge along the whole width of the Prospekt. . . . But what joy! The Cossacks wormed their way through the gap in the crowd just made by the officers, some smiled and some winked at the workers. . . .

Four times the officers tried to get the Cossacks to clear the street. These cavalymen did not openly disobey any orders, but managed to avoid riding over the demonstrators. Then the Cossacks were lined up again, across the road. But they allowed groups of workers to push past them, ducking under the bellies of the horses. And they listened to demonstrators who told them of the workers' demands. Meanwhile the crowd broke through the river bank and flooded across the thick ice.

Police and dragoons charged the crowds, but the Cossacks kept to their "pacifism". Next day Kajurov was on the streets again: he had given his son Alexander a red flag to carry, with the words "Down with the war!" stitched on. "Suddenly a Cossack tore the flag away from my son, rode several yards, held it high, tore it from the pole and put it in his pocket." Alexander "ran after the Cossack and asked him to give back the flag. This he did, letting it fall unperceived from his pocket onto the street, probably out of fear for his officer."

A few minutes later mounted police charged. Kajurov slipped past them and went up to the

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Cossacks, to talk to them. Taking off their caps the workers with him pleaded:

Brother Cossacks, you see how they treat the hungry; will you not help us?

I noticed the strange glances that Cossacks were exchanging. We had hardly moved away when they threw themselves onto the crowd: at first I thought they were helping the police, but when the police saw the Cossacks they began to run away, and the Cossacks pursued them.

He saw the crowd "chairing" a Cossack who had helped to kill one of the police. That evening Kajurov went to the Cossack barracks to argue with them. Later he went to a party committee and found there "a new face in a soldier's coat". It was a delegate from an armoured car battalion. The Cossacks' example was spreading; the army was beginning to swing over. Soon, outside a barracks, Kajurov was faced with some hundreds of undecided soldiers.

I asked very curtly why they were standing about and not joining in the revolution. Then I commanded: "Attention!" This magic word had an immediate effect. They stood still. But alas, I knew no other words of command. The soldiers realized this at once, they began to whisper among themselves and to laugh at me. Fortunately a young cadet who was dashing along relieved me from this awkward situation. He found the right words of command, the ranks formed, and they marched to Lessnoye to get the machine-gunners out of their barracks. I stayed behind feeling confused at my failure.

By the evening of March 12th Kronstadt had joined the revolution, and sailors flooded in to lead the forces who for days had to "mop up" the special police, picked men who resisted to the end. One of the first infantry battalions to go over was that of the Preobrazhensky regiment: in 1905 this regiment had been sent to Moscow to crush the insurrection there. On March 14th the Petrograd Soviet sent out its "Order No. 1": "Committees must be elected immediately by all companies, battalions, regiments, brigades, squadrons . . ." The revolution was in power.

While Petrograd was in mutiny, the army at the front followed only a pace behind. Committees were elected everywhere, unpopular officers and those who tried to resist were shot or arrested. A member of the Duma who toured the front reported to its Provisional Committee on March 26th that:

Some soldiers said quite frankly to us: "Our commander is this, that and the other; we shall kill him; everything has been arranged." To such as this we said: "Be calm, don't do anything foolish. The Provisional Government will solve these problems." . . .

Sometimes officers refuse to do anything, even to carry out the orders which come through. Then the soldiers say: "Here is an enemy of the new regime." A divisional commander . . . said: "I have thrashed this rabble in spite of everything, and shall go on thrashing them in spite of everything. If anyone grumbles he will have fifty strokes counted out."

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Throughout the army, division by division, officers of this sort came into conflict with the men, and the "rabble" thrashed them. For months the history of the eastern front was one of sporadic mutinies, usually settled by the Provisional Government's promises that they would "solve these problems."

In the navy the process was quicker and more thorough. The captain of the cruiser *Aurora*, moored in the Neva with her guns trained on turbulent Petrograd, found that "suspects" were getting at his crew: he barred their way, and was killed by his own men. The rest of the fleet, cut off from news, came into action a few days after the Petrograd workers and soldiers: on March 15th the commander-in-chief in the Baltic telegraphed to the Tsar respectfully requesting his abdication, moved by "the immense difficulty that I find in maintaining discipline in the fleet." To Helsingfors on March 16th came news of abdication; the mutiny broke out in the fleet there at once, and officers trying to enforce their authority were killed on the *Andrei Pervozvanny* and the *Pavel I*, Russia's largest and most modern battleships. A flotilla of minesweepers and the 5th Flotilla of destroyers "went up" that evening. By midnight the men had secured their main demand—to elect a fleet committee consisting of two delegates from each crew. During the next few days unpopular officers were sent ashore; those who refused to surrender their arms were arrested

or shot on the deck. At Sveaborg the commander-in-chief, Admiral Nepenin, was killed: the senior Vice-Admiral, Maximov, proclaimed himself revolutionary commander-in-chief and drove up to the shore headquarters in a car decorated by an immense red flag.

Maximov is described by Captain Graf, who has written a hysterical account of these events,¹ as eager for power (*"ferocement arriviste"*). As soon as he heard of the revolution he got himself elected, by the clerks and office-boys of his headquarters, revolutionary commander-in-chief of the Baltic Fleet. A "meeting" of sailors, soldiers and others scraped up from the streets ratified this, and the brave revolutionary vice-admiral set off, with an escort drawn from these supporters, to announce his election to Admiral Nepenin. The admiral refused to listen.

A delegation from the Government was expected at the railway station: the vice-admiral drove there: Admiral Nepenin followed, afraid to let his rival get the ear of the delegates. A crowd went with him, and in this crowd, just behind the admiral, a man in petty officer's uniform with a rifle under his arm; a "paid assassin", says Graf. The admiral was shot as he entered the station—two and a half hours before the delegates' train drew in. Graf blames Maximov, possibly correctly.

¹ H. Graf: *La Marine Russe dans la Guerre et dans la Révolution* Paris, 1928.

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Against opponents such as these, torn by personal jealousies and intrigues, the sailors won easily and rapidly. By the end of March their committees controlled the fleet. Captain Ivanov of the Second Cruiser Division writes:

The master of the fleet was Centrobalt . . . the chief revolutionary organization controlling the whole life of the Baltic fleet. The extent to which the authority of the Commander of the Fleet and his staff declined, may be judged by the fact that during such events as Kornilov's march on Petrograd, or the secession of Finland, the voice of the Commander and of his staff was entirely inaudible. The Centrobalt, on the other hand, reacted to every event in a most energetic fashion. The Centrobalt, consisted, of course, entirely of sailors.¹

In the army the soldiers' committees never grew to such a power; they controlled some aspect of the life of the troops, but not all. The staff left to them, more and more, the insoluble problem of supplies; the organized meetings, expressed the soldiers' views of their officers and on political questions, but they were uncertain of their aims, and took no decisive action. The revolution had been made by two social forces; Russia's industrialists, with "patriots" from among the nobility and among the peasantry and working class—these wanted a more vigorous and effective prosecution of the war—and Russia's factory workers, with peasants and soldiers following them, who wanted immediate

¹ M. Ivanov: "Two Telegrams" in *Lenin in Action*, London, 1934.

peace. During the spring and summer of 1917 the first of these prevailed, and launched the army in an ill-prepared and hopeless offensive against the Germans. The army Soviets were in most cases persuaded to help in organizing this offensive, but after it had failed the fraternization of Russian and German, Austrian, Polish soldiers developed rapidly, in spite of the resistance of the officers, and the army Soviets organized and encouraged this fraternization. Ensign Krylenko (who later was appointed by Lenin to command the army) describes an encounter, late in 1916, between a Russian patrol and a group of Austrians, who were brought back as prisoners to the Russian lines: the company officer wrote a glowing report of the patrol's bravery and recommended its leader for the Cross of St. George, but the patrol leader told Krylenko that when they met the Austrians they discussed: "Shall we come to you, or will you come to us?" and the greater eagerness of the Austrians to surrender had led to the Russian "victory". Then came the revolution.

The first result was totally unexpected by the officers. This was an unspoken agreement, along the whole length of the front, about 1000 versts (660 miles) to make no offensive under any circumstances.

This passive silent sabotage of the war was the first response of the peasant army to the revolution. . . .

March to May was the period of the gradual separation of the army from the officers. The old discipline, the old fear of the superior vanished more and more

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completely. . . . Fraternization was spontaneous and unorganized practically everywhere. . . . On Easter Day between our trenches and those of the Austrians there were good-tempered conversations, laughter, discussions on politics and the way to end the war. I went over to German lines with the soldiers and was received there in a friendly way until a German officer arrived, scattered his men and threatened to have me shot if I didn't get out. . . . When I returned to my company I was immediately summoned to regimental headquarters and severely reprimanded. The soldiers thereupon sent a deputation to the regimental commander threatening to do away with the whole staff if repressive measures were taken against me.

While this feeling for peace grew everywhere, the Provisional Government sorted out the more disciplined divisions and on the 1st of July sent them over the top. The following units are noted in a government report as expressing willingness to undertake an offensive but at the same time refusing to move up to the front: Siberian Regiments 1 and 8, Regiment 218 of the 55th Division, all the 2nd Caucasian Grenadier Division, all the 169th Division, and six regiments of other units. In each case the men "put forward various demands which are often absolutely nonsensical". In a typical peasant way the army, agreeing in words with its officers and the great men of the Government, was following in fact its own road towards peace. And when the offensive failed the army's demand for demobilization, for a real peace, grew rapidly. And the peasant

soldiers began to educate themselves in politics: John Reed found at the front in the autumn a Government "Commissar of the Twelfth Army" who reported that

the most serious lack at the front, more serious than the lack of food and clothes, is the lack of books, pamphlets and newspapers. You see, since the revolution the army has absorbed tons of literature, propaganda, and has a gnawing hunger. . . .¹

When, therefore, those who desired more effective warfare pushed General Kornilov into a rising against Kerensky's Government, which by its "weakness" was allowing indiscipline to grow in the army, soldiers and their Soviets destroyed Kornilov, aided by workers who went out along the railways to talk to his troops. And when the final clash came between supporters of the war and those whose aim it was to get a separate peace on any terms, battalion after battalion of the Petrograd garrison came over to the Soviets and the Military Revolutionary Committee, until the only supporters of Kerensky's shrivelling Government were a few officers and a group of officer-cadets. Some Cossack battalions might have fought for Kerensky—if he had not run away in disguise.

Hunger, longing for peace, hatred for the callous rulers who had wrecked their country—these and many other forces combined to bring about the mutiny of the Petrograd garrison that was a neces-

¹ John Reed: *Daughter of the Revolution*, New York 1927, p. 158.

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sary and decisive part of the Bolshevik revolution. It was a mutiny organized by workers and sailors and by the Bolshevik party, but wherever these leaders of the revolt could find, among the officers, an honest man they could trust to carry out the demands of the men, they used him to the limits of his capacity. Witness the story of Modest Ivanov, as he tells it.¹

This captain had been elected in May by 3000 men of the Baltic Fleet to command the Second Cruiser Division. The Provisional Government determined "to restore discipline" in the fleet. Ivanov, because the sailors trusted him, was in fact the only officer who could keep the cruisers at sea and prevent the Germans from entering the Gulf of Finland. The Government dismissed him, for being too "lenient". He was called to the Admiralty and informed: "You are retired" by a Socialist-Revolutionary who had been appointed Minister of the Navy.

Ivanov returned to his ship, handed over to his second-in-command, and left for Abo where he put up at an hotel.

But two hours had barely elapsed when delegates from the ship committees came to me and called upon me to return with them to the cruiser *Rossia*.

Arriving on the *Rossia*, I observed that a large number of the crew had returned from shore and that a meeting was in progress, attended even by delegates

¹ *Lenin in Action*, p. 32 et seq.

from the submarine fleet, the shore crews, and from the battleship stationed at Helsingfors. The meeting was a stormy one. I was called upon to give an explanation. Since I had nothing to conceal, I related everything that had happened. The meeting passed a curt resolution couched as follows:

"First-rank Captain, Modest Ivanov, is instructed to remain Chief of the Division and anyone appointed in his place shall be flung overboard."

This resolution was sent with a delegation to the Commander of the Fleet.

And so, by revolutionary means, I retained my position as Chief of the Division.

Immediately after the Bolshevik revolution Ivanov received a telegram:

Modest Ivanov, Fourth-Rank Captain. Helsingfors. We request you to proceed immediately to Petrograd, Smolny. Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, Ulyanov (Lenin).

He went to Petrograd, found Lenin's room with considerable difficulty, and waited.

After about ten minutes there emerged from behind the partition a short, stockily-built individual, with a large head, or rather a large prominent forehead, and very badly shaved. But what particularly attracted my attention were his eyes. His face was rather of a Kal-muck type, and his eyes revealed a keen mind. This was Comrade Lenin. I rose and we shook hands. We then seated ourselves on either side of a small table. I shall try to report our conversation word for word.

Lenin: You have been sent by the fleet?

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I: Yes.

Lenin: You are a socialist?

I: Yes, I think I am. But not a great socialist. . . . At any rate regard me as rather a green socialist.

Lenin: At any rate, you read the newspapers and interest yourself in current events?

I: Not only do I read the papers and interest myself, but rather unexpectedly for me it has been my fate to take part in those events.

Lenin smiled. It must be confessed that the smile lit up his face astonishingly.

Lenin: You are, I hope, opposed to the government of Rodzyanko and Kerensky.

I: I am in general opposed to all governments that rely on bayonets.

A slight pause ensued. It seemed to me that Lenin was reading my thoughts.

I must make a slight diversion here in order that what follows might be better understood.

I am a naval officer. I had never concerned myself with politics. Owing to my military training and fairly long military experience, I was somewhat inclined to look down on everything not connected with naval affairs.

For me, Lenin was a journalist from somewhere abroad, writing something I did not understand, or rather, was not interested in. But since the February Revolution I had learnt a lot and understood a lot. I sensed with every fibre of my being that something great was taking place, something purely of the people. An internal, all-absorbing process was taking place within me. But all this I grasped more emotionally than mentally.

And sitting thus confronting Lenin, I involuntarily thought: "Here I am, an old sea-dog, and for some

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reason or other we are sitting here preparing to discuss some question or other."

It seemed to me that Lenin divined what was going on in my mind. He said:

"It is not the government, but the people who will defend the conquests of the revolution with the bayonet."

We sat regarding each other for some time, and then Lenin said:

"Take command of all the naval forces of the Petrograd area."

Ivanov demurred, but by November 17th he was Minister-adjoint for the Navy: the Minister fled abroad, and Ivanov took charge, under a People's Commissar.

Here for the first time was a man appointed to command by crews in mutiny, and raised from that command, by the success of the mutiny, to control of the fleet.

The sailors and soldiers of Russia had won their battle; peace was made. But not without further fights, a struggle within the Bolshevik party itself. The Kaiser's generals imposed heavy terms; Trotsky and Radek were in favour of refusing to sign; Lenin insisted on signing "to get a few weeks' breathing space". "We must carry out the will of those who put us here," argued Lenin; "the Soviets of the workers have voted for peace; those of the peasants have voted for peace; those of the army. . . ."

"When did the army get a chance to vote?" interrupted Radek.

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"They've voted with their feet!" answered Lenin.
"They've gone home!"

This was so. And from the peace of Brest-Litovsk the Kaiser's generals gained strength for a few months, but they were broken by it within the year. Russia's example was there for every German to see, and in the end to follow. Peace by mutiny was poison to these generals, and the poison spread.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WE'LL MAKE PEACE OURSELVES



The Great War had to end somehow. The way that it did in fact end seems now the inevitable and unescapable way: a mutiny in the German Navy at Kiel, strikes and political disarray at Berlin, declaration of the Republic in part of Germany that had never been welded tightly to the Empire, collapse of the machinery by which Ludendorff and his staff controlled the country, the Emperor's ignominious flight. Many people in England know that a mutiny of the sailors was decisive in ending the war and made it ridiculous even to consider a defensive campaign by Germany alone, her allies broken. Few know that this decisive action had been prepared and made possible by an earlier mutiny, in the summer of 1917.

This earlier mutiny, small and "a failure", yet an essential factor in the ending of the war, is described in an official report made by the commander-in-chief. The following pages are a translation of this report by Admiral Scheer.

MUTINY

G.g. 6025 B1

*Headquarters of the
High Sea Fleet,*

7th October, 1917.

VERY SECRET

1. The events that have occurred in the course of the past few months among the crews of the fighting units under my command are now known in their smallest details, so that their causes and their development can be seen at a glance and the measures that must be taken are clearly revealed.

[2]¹

2. On all the vessels in the High Sea Fleet command, just as in the German Empire and at the fronts, the conditions of subsistence were defective during the summer. The situation made it necessary to keep at their bases the larger fighting units, and this deprived their crews of all powerful stimulus from outside, and prevented them retaining the conviction—a conviction that always follows from vigorous activity—that to continue “to hold on” was necessary.

Visits home, and complaining letters, gave an idea that was not cheering of the difficulties of subsistence suffered behind the lines, and the concern felt for relatives who were sometimes enduring a severe struggle with misery paralysed any zeal for continuing “to hold on” in the monotonous conditions on board ship.

¹ Figures in square brackets mark the number of lines of the original omitted as inessential.

3. The needs of the submarine arm led to continual changes among the higher ranks, particularly among those who had shown their quality and were in the closest contact with the men. The latter no longer felt that they were guided and watched over as they had been in the past. Leisure, given them more generously with the aim of sparing their strength in this period of scarcity, gave them the opportunity to devote themselves more frequently to political reading. Questions of internal policy, which just at that moment were occupying all minds in Germany, naturally found in these conditions a lively echo on board the fleet, particularly among the older men already accustomed to political activity. And in this way several of them, whose intelligence distinguished them from the others, acquired certain ideas, such as those for example of the Russian revolution.

4. These men sought for and soon found sympathizers, and from their desire to spread their ideas was born an organization which worked according to well-tried political methods.

At the head of the intellectual direction was the leading stoker Sachse, of the *Friedrich der Grosse*. On this vessel was the central committee for the rest of the fleet. On each vessel they tried to enrol a "steward"¹; these in their turn were to choose

¹ More literally a "man of confidence", a phrase that has another meaning in English. The word here translated "steward" was sometimes used for what we would call a company or mess orderly.

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"stewards" in each of the divisions (of the ship's crew). There were more than enough men who thought themselves talented in "agitation".

5. The movement became dangerous as soon as liaison was established with leaders of the Independent Socialist Party in the Reichstag. The latter, while careful not to run risks themselves were able to swing the men in a very definite direction. The aim was to be to gather in the Fleet as many signatures as possible, with which these members of the Reichstag would go to the conference at Stockholm and present themselves to the delegates from enemy countries as representatives of the sailors. They wanted to prove by means of these lists of signatures that the crews of the German Fleet were in agreement with them and accepted their aim. And this aim was peace without annexations at the earliest possible moment.

To force the Government towards this there was to be organized, on a day fixed by the party leaders, and at the same time as a general strike in all munition factories, a refusal to obey orders by the armed forces.

6. With these fine words of "peace soon" it was not difficult to seduce wide circles among the crews, given their state of morale above. By telling the crews that influential men in Berlin were behind them, that a movement was being prepared in the enemy countries in exactly the same manner, that they were committing no treason against the

Fatherland since no acts of violence were being prepared, the number of signatures was rapidly increased. And wherever a certain number of adherents had been gathered, they did not hesitate to employ methods other than those of simple persuasion to bring in supporters. It has also been proved that a large number of signatures were got fraudulently on innocent pretexts.

7. By an unlucky coincidence it happened that just at this moment the Messing Commissions (*menage kommissionenen*) for the crews were instituted. The decree instituting these only made general a form of organization long existent on many ships and in the army, but it made it possible at this moment for the "Commissions" of the vessels, under pretext of "conferences on the supply of food" to meet each other—in particular, those "Commissions" of which the members were wholly or in part chosen by the crews. At the beginning of these meetings the discussions were on questions of supply, but they went on to discuss political aims and became an active propaganda for the Independent Socialist Party. These meetings took place in the Wilhelmshafen saloons, in other places near the anchorage of the vessels, sheds of the naval workshop, empty railway carriages, etc. . . .

8. It was natural that the disquiet introduced among the crews should show itself soon in some way or another. The real leaders who perhaps dreamed of defending their ideals effectively were

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passed over, and there came to the front representatives of propaganda by action, violent men, most of them with a record of punishments, among whom there was a spirit of revolt.

9. The crews refused, on several occasions, to touch their meals; from other signs it was clear that work was being done with less vigour.

The command was not inattentive to these signs, but an explanation for them was sought in the conditions of supply and the weariness caused by the long duration of the war.

10. The first serious incident occurred on the *Pillau*: leave not having been given in the way the men hoped, part of the crew (about one hundred and forty) left the ship, which was in dock, without being observed on the afternoon of July 20th, and returned only after the end of the day's work.

11. A completely similar case occurred on the *Prinzregent-Luitpold* on August 1st. There also fifty men left the arsenal without being seen, marched in column to the sea-wall, and returned several hours later. Severe punishments were then given, and eleven men who had already been noted for bad conduct or were classed as ringleaders, were sent for trial or punished with the heaviest disciplinary penalties.

12. As a sort of demonstration against these punishments the crew (of the *Prinzregent-Luitpold*) decided to leave the ship *en bloc*. Next day this was in fact done: about four hundred men took part.

They went to Rustersiel along the sea-wall. On the way the ringleader Köbis (later condemned to death) made seditious speeches. It was however possible, after several hours, to get the men to return, without the use of force.

[2]

13. While an inquiry into these events was sitting, a certain number of men on the *Westfalen* refused to carry out coaling; they were brought to obedience by their superiors. On the *Rheinland* there were cases of indiscipline: a large number of men broke ranks simultaneously during inspection, to enforce the granting of leave. The inquiry showed that the revolutionary movement had also penetrated the First Squadron. Although the ringleaders there were at once arrested, their aims were pursued with an almost fanatical tenacity by others. "Stewards" in always increasing numbers replaced those imprisoned and tried to get in contact with civilian political sympathizers. In spite of the surveillance, they succeeded in the end in holding a new conference but this was broken up by the police and resulted in the arrest of the agent of the Independent Socialist Party in Kiel, and of "stewards" from various vessels.

14. The verdicts of the courts-martial have been, or will be, published.

There has, naturally, also been the same vigour against participants who were not brought before courts-martial. Thus on the *Prinzregent-Luitpold* more

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than two hundred men have been imprisoned (of whom fifty were given a fortnight's rigorous imprisonment) and a hundred and fifty men were degraded from the rank of leading seaman.

15. It can be agreed that the heavy sentences given, or that will be given, have brought the crews to reason, and that, the higher ranks having recognized the danger, this danger is averted for the moment. Our most important duty now is to prevent its reappearance.

[4]

(a) In very many documents, even in those emanating from well-intentioned and impartial persons, the following criticism is to be found: the officers live well, and let their crews suffer from privations.¹

[12]

(b) Several anonymous letters, the authors of which it has luckily been possible to discover . . . show that the ringleaders sought to destroy confidence in the officers by accusing the latter of appropriating foodstuffs from the supplies due to the crews. No proof has been provided for these accusations . . . but members of messes and petty officers must show a very strict personal discipline from this point of view.

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There follow announcements of better rations and

¹ Advice is given as to how officers should behave to refute this "wickedly distorted" view: they must be "not only leaders but comrades of their men".

recommendations as to sports and patriotic propaganda.

Two members of the crew of a vessel forming part of the fleet . . . got out a leaflet stating that the war was begun by us for capitalist interests and that it is being carried on at the expense of the life-blood of the people. The representation of these criminal opinions are unable or refuse to see that they are only serving the enemy.

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More exhortations to patriotic propaganda by officers, and advice as to how to watch out for revolutionaries.

It is necessary to mark certain points arising from the inquiry:

(i) Adherents of the Independent Socialist Party employ the letters I.S.P.¹ so that a word at the beginning of what they are writing begins with *I*, a word in the middle, with *S*, at the end with *P*.

(ii) Meetings are held in the open air, as far as is possible under our close watch, in order to lessen the danger of a raid.

(iii) Members of the I.S.P. try to guard against "spies" by certain signs. So far we have discovered the following:

(a) On "even" days of the month, the right hand in a pocket; on "uneven" days, the left hand.

(b) Metal discs punched with morse code indications of ship and number, or membership cards.

¹ U.S.P. in German.

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(c) Pass-words, for example the question:
Can one play cards here?¹

[19]

(viii) When arrests are necessary, the following measures should be undertaken.

Immediate isolation of the accused, who should even be transported separately. Detailed inspection of the storerooms, lockers and ventilating shafts to which the man detained may have had access. General inspection of lockers; arrest of men on whom are found lists of names with dates, birth-places, or recognition signs such as those mentioned above; the correspondence of the men arrested to be examined secretly. General supervision, in secret, of the correspondence of all the crew, except that of the petty officers.

(ix) The violence of the revolutionary movement is extraordinary and it is necessary that all ranks of officers should pay the greatest attention to preventing a new explosion.

The task of commanders who have on board many men of the older classes, but few petty officers and officers except those who are young and untried, is not easy. It is all the more important for these commanders to teach their subordinates to remain always, as men in authority, conscious of their high mission—to regard events with candour and assurance, to know not only their duty but their

¹ More usual "methods of conspiracy" are then mentioned: for example, the refusal to mention any names when arrested.

rights in regard to their inferiors, and, strong in this knowledge, to act resolutely and without fear of responsibility.¹

Signed, SCHEER.

This document has the qualities of the man and the class that ruled the German Navy. Scheer—like Ludendorff, who was the son of a rural estate agent—came from parents who were not well-to-do; he was a parson's son, ambitious, hard-working, practical and thorough. He was without imagination, and could not see that the German naval officer needed no reminder of "his rights in regard to his inferiors", or that these "rights" were one of the principal causes of the mutiny. And Scheer was very careful of his reputation: he therefore omits entirely from his account of the mutiny the events that occurred on his own flagship, the *Kaiser Friedrich der Grosse*. He also naturally omits the promises given by commanders on several occasions that there should be no punishments.

We can best fill the gaps in Scheer's report by outlining what happened, and discussing later the causes of the mutiny.

From the autumn of 1915 there had been in existence a small group of revolutionary seamen; Sachse, one of their leaders, picked out by the admiral as the brain behind the mutiny, has described the work of this group and its aims. His "Revolu-

¹ Quoted by Charles Vidil: Appendix, *Les Mutineries de la Marine Allemande*.

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tionary Sailors of Germany"¹ was published under a pseudonym, "Anti-Nautikus", but his authorship is clearly established. His name appears under a number of articles on these mutinies that appeared in the Munich Communist Press in 1925 and 1926. These revolutionaries had two aims, combined, neither taking precedence: to rouse the crews to resist the worsening of their conditions, and to break the power of the military machine with the aim of securing a "white peace"—peace by agreement, on "equal terms". Sachse writes:

In the first phase there was a movement against the worsening of conditions of life on board. But when Russia shone "in the dawn-light of Revolution" the movement in the Navy received also a great political impulse. It began to go along a revolutionary political path. The struggle on the *Prinzregent-Luitpold* for the liberation of the mutineers incarcerated in July 1917, the struggle on the *Friedrich der Grosse* not only for bread but also for the establishment of messing committees, were already political struggles. . . . Though obscure and fluctuating, our fight was a political effort that reached its consummation in 1918 through the Revolution.²

In the early years of the war this struggle was carried on in secret and on a tiny scale. It was a matter of argument and propaganda reaching a few men only, binding them into a tight group.

¹ *Deutschlands revolutionäre Matrosen*, published by Karl Schulzke, Hamburg introduction by Ernst Thaelmann, 1925.

² Munich *Neue Zeitung*, 3rd February, 1926.

During the hungry winter of 1916-17 when frost-blackened potatoes, acorns, turnip-tops and similar foods were the principal dishes in civilian Germany, the navy's rations were also cut down severely; the revolutionaries began to find an echo between decks when they spoke on the supply of food, the need for crews to elect their own mess stewards and committees. Then came the Russian revolution of 1917: naval officers at Kronstadt were made prisoners or in some cases killed by their crews. Russia was talking now of "peace without annexations or indemnities", and the talk spread westward, penetrating the steel sides of the big ships. Little demonstrations began; after lights-out, between decks, men shouted: "We are hungry! No more marmalade!" (Germany was short not only of butter but of butter substitutes, oils for margarine, and the sailors had bread and "marmalade", the latter was a revolting concoction of turnips chemically coloured and flavoured. Their demand was to be spared this "food".)

In April 1917 the Social Democratic Party split. The Social Democrats of the majority, led by Scheidemann, claimed that they stood for a "peace of understanding" but found it sufficient to support the German Government in its peace offer of January 1917: this offer included the retention of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany, the payment of an indemnity by France, restoration of colonies to Germany, and a frontier "securing Germany and Poland" against Russia. It was very vague about Belgium. This

offer was rejected out of hand by the Allies, and Scheidemann then said in the Reichstag, on February 27th, 1917, that the plans of the Entente were "plans for conquest and annihilation" of Germany, and that "our honour, our existence, our free economic development are at stake". The Socialist minority were, however, more suspicious of the German Government's honesty, though they did not openly attack the Government which claimed to be "of the Left"; this minority, who formed the new Independent Socialist Party declared that there were disastrous ambiguities in the peace offer, and blamed for these the Nationalist groups whose propaganda for "a German peace" was open. The Nationalists, who wanted annexation of Belgium and Briey, of Poland and the Baltic provinces, a few weeks later formed the "Fatherland Party", and chose for their leader Admiral von Tirpitz, founder of the German Navy. These changes made great stir in Germany, and the revolutionary sailors saw in them the growth of a party which could develop out of vagueness and hesitation in the direction of their aims, and did on the peace issue come very close to the aims of the Mensheviks and their allies in Russia, then believed to be the "aims of the Russian revolution". They saw also the growth of a party devoted to opposing these aims, and at the head of it the man who was the essence and ideal of the German naval officer. They felt that "things were coming their way" and

began to think of action and its political effects.

Their efforts to get in contact with the leaders of the Independent Socialists succeeded, but they got nothing from them except lists for signatures and warnings to be careful. But they must have received encouragement and aid from some of the younger rank and file of the Independents, who had followed Liebknecht in his total opposition to the war, his heroic tiny May Day demonstration of 1916, his continual anti-militarist agitation—"he who has the youth has the army!" had always been Liebknecht's slogan.

Liebknecht, who had been in prison before the war for his book *Militarism and Anti-Militarism*, refused to obey the discipline of his party; he voted against war credits in the Reichstag and called for struggle not only against the Nationalists but the Government. "Our enemies are not the English, French or Russian peoples, but the great German landed proprietors, the German capitalists and their executive committee." By the last three words he meant the Government, and his hearers understood him. Here were plain words, able to pierce the armour-plate of battleships.

And April 1917 brought also the first big strikes in Germany; in Leipzig and Berlin there were, for several days, between 125,000 and 200,000 workers on strike, amongst them munition workers. Better rations, particularly bread rations, were the main demands of the strikers, but the resolutions adopted

at Leipzig referred also to peace without annexations, and to universal suffrage. These were political strikes, directed at the Government more than at the employers as such. They were settled peacefully; the censorship cut out all reference to them in the Press; but news of them came to Wilhelmshafen and Kiel. The latter town was becoming a stronghold of the Independent Socialists.

To this period belongs the story of the first organized action by a large group of men on the *Friedrich der Grosse*. The stokers and engine-room ratings, who need to wash from head to foot every time they leave their work, were told that their ration of soap would be cut down. They were then getting each month three small tablets of *ersatz* soap—crumbling, sandy stuff—and a packet of soap powder. To wash their clothes they had added to this, in the past, some of the grease used on the machinery—the trouble with “war soap” was that there was no grease or fat in it. And now this was impossible, for the machine-room grease “was now messed up with unnameable substitutes”.

Sachse, coming off duty, was asked to go to a meeting with men of the other watch, and went back to the machine-room, grumbling at the loss of sleep. There he found not only stokers and engine-men but seamen, including Riechpietsch, who later was the crews’ delegate to see the “Independent” leaders in Berlin. The sailors, though their work was not so filthy as that on the boilers and engines,

were furious: their soap powder was to go: how could they keep their clothes decent? Proposals included throwing the officers' soap in the sea, a general strike on the ship, and an attempt to mix some of their foul-smelling soap in the officers' food. (The officers, besides their rations, bought soap ashore and found it easy to get quantities of "kitchen soap", a superior sort of plain soap, from the ship's galleys).

It was eventually agreed that one watch of the "black squad" should strike when the battleship was near the shore—not in port, but off the mouth of the river—and that the other watch and the "deck" sailors should wait to see the result. At Wilhelmshafen Sachse got workers ashore to write out, by hand, five hundred copies of a leaflet appealing to all the "black squad" and comparing their conditions with those of the officers. These were so badly scrawled as to be almost illegible, but they did the job.

The vessel left for sea, but did not anchor in the roads as usual. Men from the wireless-room reported that an engagement was possible; the fleet was moving towards the Dogger Bank. Riechpietsch wanted to postpone the "strike" till the fleet was returning; Sachse disagreed, and gave the word for action at midnight. The watch lined up just before midnight, for the relief; the engineer-officer gave the order to march to their places. No one moved. The order was repeated; the officer of the

watch was sent for from the bridge. He said: "Present your reports and requests." Sachse stepped a pace forward, in the regulation way, and asked for the old ration of soap.

During the pause that followed, while the officers were consulting together, the whole of the front rank, as if to some unspoken order, stepped one pace forward and men began to speak all along the line. The officers at once promised that the ration would be restored.

It was. But later, when men were washing after their four hours below, they were ordered to parade for an "inspection of cleanliness", and lost three-quarters of an hour's sleep, standing naked while an officer or warrant officer, very slowly and carefully, went over them "to see that the soap was really being used, not carried ashore to trade to women".

From small unimportant "incidents" of this sort, through organized "ca'-canny" and "hunger-strikes"—refusal to touch the food put before them—the movement grew until July 1917. Then the captain of the *Prinzregent-Luitpold* decided to punish all his stokers and engine-crews for their slowness in loading stores and getting repair work done in the boiler-rooms. He decreed that they should do punishment drill instead of receiving leave ashore.

Protests were made; those protesting were arrested. The march ashore reported by Scheer, led by Köbis, was a further protest, against these arrests and for

"freedom outside working hours". At the end of the march Köbis spoke, and did not cease speaking when a lieutenant entered with an armed patrol. At the end of his speech the lieutenant summoned the men to go back to their ship. They refused, and he was told that if he did not leave they would find it necessary to disarm him and his men. He left. The meeting—the men were sheltering under a deserted sea-wall restaurant built on concrete piles—then discussed and passed a resolution of congratulations to the revolutionary seamen of Russia, and the men marched back to their ship.

Orders were at once given to the whole squadron to put to sea. The "black squad" on the *Prinzregent-Luitpold* refused to start work until their demands were granted: those arrested to be released, freedom when working hours were over. The vice-admiral commanding the squadron promised that these demands would be met; promises are cheap coin.

Then the highest point of the struggle was reached. While stokers and engineers were shut in the dark recesses of the battleship, which led the squadron to sea, sailors on the *Prinzregent-Luitpold* discovered that officers were discussing the holding of immediate courts-martial. Some hours later, when the vessel had lost sight of the rest of the squadron (which anchored at the mouth of the Jade), they managed to get a wireless message to the men of the *Kaiser Friedrich der Grosse*, telling the "central committee" there of the danger threatening them. At ten that

night the "responsible men" of the flagship met in the dynamo hold by the third engine-room; Sachse's plan for a strike throughout the ship received sixteen votes; a proposal to wait until they heard that some mutineer had been shot, on the *Prinz-regent*, and then to lynch at night the officers of the *Freidrich der Grosse*, received five votes.

Sachse decided on action at four a.m. The stokers would have to bear the weight of the struggle: they must draw fires and quench them. He himself, by luck or accident or a little careful arrangement, would be at that hour in charge of the telephone switchboard by which orders were distributed throughout the ship to phones and loud-speakers.

At three-fifty a.m. he rang up the boiler-rooms: "draw fires!" A second mate (petty officer) was beside him, and tried to seize the mouthpiece. Sailors took hold of the petty officer and told him his head "would look like strawberry jam soon if he wasn't quiet". Sachse telephoned to the bridge: "The engine-crews and stokers refuse service." Then for six minutes, in desperate tension, he waited for news. If the stokers did not draw fires by four a.m., the blow had failed. At three-fifty-six stokehold number three reported that fires were drawn, were out. He telephoned the news at once to the three other boiler-rooms. Just as the last of these reported that it had followed suit, the order was given: "Battle stations!" It came from the vice-admiral.

Between midnight and four a.m. messages had

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been sent out at regular intervals on the flagship's wireless informing the crews of other vessels of the "order" to strike. Sachse writes:

We did not have to worry about contact with the other vessels (after 4 a.m.): the Admiralty looked after that itself. From their wireless rooms . . . the other ships announced one after another the mutiny of the stokers and the immobilization of the ships. Our example spread.

The captain of the *Freidrich der Grosse* went down himself to the stokehold; he was told the men's demands: liberation of the men arrested on the *Prinzregent-Luitpold*; respect for the promise made that there should be no punishments on that ship for the events of the past few days; election of a ship's committee who could bring the crews' complaints straight to the captain.

When he heard our demands, he flew into a fury; the point of his well-kept beard curled up like a scorpion's tail in a fight. He pulled out his dirk, and, blind with rage, threatened to strike those near him. One of our friends, a young giant, armed himself with a big coal-scoop and offered to duel with him.

Officers restrained the captain; while they argued, a loud-speaker announced that men on deck summoned to "battle stations" were refusing to take their places at the guns. The captain agreed to place the demands before the admiral. And he went to the admiral's stateroom escorted by stokers.

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The stateroom was picketed till word came: "All ships will be informed by wireless that the disciplinary measures taken against crews of the *Prinzregent-Luitpold* and other ships as a result of recent events, are annulled." And this order was in fact sent out. The men went off at once, before they received orders, to relight the fires; in four hours the squadron had steam up.

The command was cautious now; nothing could be done till the organization leading these mutinies was discovered and arrested. Leaderless and isolated, the crews would not be able to reply. Men came from the police presidency in Berlin, Germany's Scotland Yard, to work in the stokeholds; Catholics from Bavaria were drafted into each watch; offers were made to pay for information; none of these methods yielded much, and the leaders and their organization were only discovered when gross mistakes—"breaches of revolutionary discipline", Sachse calls them—were committed by one of the leaders.

A conference of the sailors' revolutionary organization was held; its main work was to organize a service to supply the whole fleet with Socialist papers and pamphlets. (The most practicable method, it was agreed, was to use the crews of officers' pinnaces, as these were always "paying calls" from ship to ship.) Then new methods of recruitment to the organization were discussed, and the spokesman of the *Pillau* proposed that those

who refused to join should be boycotted; their hammocks cut down at night; the rosaries of the Catholics taken from them. He was in a minority, but refused to accept the majority's decision. He was honest enough, Sachse thinks; but it is clear that he was one of the anarchists who emerge in any revolutionary situation and soon compromise those with whom they work. Sachse had requested that no written notes be made, but this man took away with him—probably forgetting them, in his anger at the leaders' "cowardice"—a list of names of those proposed for the central committee, and a list of the leaders on each ship. He went back and began to apply his "method", until a young stoker, bullied and worried, complained to his parents and the parents complained to the authorities. The matter went "through the usual channels", and one of these channels was the wireless service between the shore and the Admiral of the Squadron then at sea. The message was in the hands of the "central committee" before it reached the Admiralty, "and we were able", says Sachse, "to discuss the measures that should be taken before we handed over the despatch to our illustrious guest." The leader of the *Pillau* group was on leave in Bavaria; he was warned and escaped to Switzerland.

But next night he came back across the frontier to see his wife. He was arrested, searched, and the lists of names were found in his pocket. That

ended the organization and the mutiny of 1917. And two men died: Alwin Köbis and Max Riechpietsch were shot for treason, by a squad of reservists, at Wahn on September 5th, 1917. Five death sentences had been imposed; three were commuted to fifteen years in prison. Some three hundred and sixty years imprisonment was the total awarded by the courts-martial; as Admiral Scheer points out, there were also a very large number of smaller disciplinary punishments. The vessels affected had been the following, all battleships or large cruisers:

Friedrich der Grosse (flagship), *König Albert*, *Kaiserin*, *Prinzregent-Luitpold*, *Grosser Kurfürst*, *Kronprinz*, *Westfalen*, *Rheinland*, *Heligoland*, *Ostfriesland*, *Pillau*, *Posen*, *Schwaben*, *Zeithen*, *Kaiser*.

There had been no mutinies on the submarines, the torpedo craft, minesweepers and minelayers; on these vessels, more constantly employed and with smaller, more isolated crews, the discipline was not so strictly Prussian and the quality of the officers was higher.

Two points in Sachse's story, which we have summarized as a counter and supplement to Scheer's report, need some discussion. One is the ability of the revolutionaries to communicate by wireless. The German Navy, built up on the model of a modern large-scale industry, taught its men and its officers very little beyond their immediate duties. All a man at a gun had to know was the three motions for opening the breech-block; he was also

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taught to act in one other capacity, perhaps as a loader in case the loader was killed. Otherwise he learnt nothing, except how to do fatigue duties. The wireless-rooms were completely in the hands of specialists and the only officers and petty officers concerned in the work of coding, despatching, receiving and decoding messages were men appointed to maintain discipline, not themselves technically trained. It was, therefore, possible for members of the organization in the wireless-rooms to do as they pleased.

A second point is the calling of general conferences of the ships' "stewards" or delegates. This shows that the leaders of the organization though they had carried on their propaganda for perhaps two years, in secret, were completely ignorant of the normal methods employed by revolutionaries in such propaganda and organization. It is, in fact, a refutation of the German Nationalists' repeated claim that the revolutionary organization in the navy was inspired and directed by experienced revolutionaries ashore. André Marty, leader of a mutiny that will be described later, writes commenting on Sachse's story, that

these plenary reunions of delegates seem to have been a grave mistake. These "elections" of a revolutionary central committee are, in my view, to be rejected out of hand. . . . It only needs one person present at these conferences who is imprudent, and the whole organization falls into the nets of the police. It is this that de-

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capitulated the movement of the German sailors in 1917.¹

How shall we decide on the relative weight of the causes that made this mutiny? It is clear that the first places are taken by the "political factors", the growth of a group of revolutionary socialists among the sailors, the Russian revolution, the political strikes, the campaign of the Independent Socialists for a "white peace", the work of Karl Liebknecht. But all these factors affected the German Army also, and in that incomparable war machine there were no mutinies in 1917, scarcely any at the end of the war. There are, of course, aspects of the life of any navy that make the sailors more likely to revolt than soldiers are—aspects we have mentioned in the previous chapter. But apart from these, what were the principal reasons for this revolt of 1917? It is clear from the admiral's report, from Sachse's story and Plivier's novels that the worst irritant, the thing that most continually roused feeling, was the difference in conditions between the officers and men. The shortage of food and soap, the monotony, the periods without leave—these things were in themselves endurable, and became unendurable (to ordinary men, not at first Socialists or less patriotic than their fellows in the army) only when the officers were seen to be enjoying little shortage and less boredom. The navy was usually in or near port; it was not difficult for most of the officers to have their wives or mistresses at

¹ Introduction to *La Paix par la Révolution*, Paris, 1926.

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Kiel or Wilhelmshafen and to sleep ashore frequently. The men, drawn from all parts of Germany, could not afford to bring their families to the ports; and the women of the ports were supervised with German thoroughness to weed out those who might give away naval secrets. Their numbers were much reduced; leave to sleep ashore was rarely given; the contrast between men and officers was more glaring perhaps, in this respect than in any other. And if it is thought that we are reducing the stature of the men who sacrificed themselves for their main aim, peace, by mentioning this aspect of the motives of some of them, the answer must be given that war does in fact, and inevitably, destroy the normal lives of men and women and cut them off from relationships that are among those fundamental to civilization; as a fact, the longing for normal sexual relations is one of the most urgent sources of the longing for peace; as a fact, the men most restrained and happily married feel this strain as fully as any others—war's destruction of morals destroys morale.

The naval ports were "fortress areas"; a wife working at Hamburg might travel to Cuxhaven for a Sunday's glimpse of her man, and find that she was not allowed to leave the station: the couple would sit in the railway waiting-room, among many others penned there—so many that sometimes pathetic families could not even find room to sit down—for four or five hours. . . . And walking back towards his ship in the dusk the sailor would

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have to step off the pavement as he met and saluted a second lieutenant escorting something in frills. This contrast, which could not exist in the same way among the ever-shifting armies, symbolized for him the heirarchy of classes, inescapable, rigid, fixed, that to his mind kept the war going, made peace impossible.

The arrogance and rigidity of the German ruling castes—the “sea officers” in the larger vessels scarcely acknowledged the existence of engineer officers and other “technicians”—made it impossible for them to change their way of living. Men in a fighting force are, usually, willing enough to see those whom they respect as leaders in battle living differently from themselves; but the German fleet was seldom in battle. The officers were seen as figureheads and disciplinarians only. And the German naval officers got no example of restraint from those to whom they looked with something approaching reverence, the ruling princes. Paul Gentizon, special correspondent of the Paris *Temps*, wrote from Berlin in December 1918:

From the princes of Thurn and Taxis, the dukes of Anhalt, to the kings of Saxony and Bavaria, among all the big or little rulers of Germany, there was not a single one who submitted to the governments’ rules on the rationing of foodstuffs, not one who shared voluntarily the privations of his subjects. Bread cards and meat cards, coupons for sixty-two grammes (two and one eighth ounces) of fat per week, thin broth: all these things were good for the people.

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In the Royal Palace in the centre of Berlin, Gentizon was invited by the revolutionary sailors who were then using the building as their head-quarters, to inspect the cellars, which convinced him of the "exceptional appetite" of the ex-Kaiser and his sons.

I knew that I should find masses of provisions there; but really, the riches of these reserve stores exceeded the most vivid expectations. All that the imagination of the makers of nourishing *delikatessen* could invent was massed there in Pantagruelian pyramids; I am not exaggerating, the value of this pile of provisions is estimated at over a million marks (£100,000). On the solid shelves boxes of pork and sausages, piles of dried vegetables, towers of sugar-loaves, enormous cubes of patés in boxes . . . and here are heaps of apples, pears, all the products of the orchards of Bavaria. Hundred weights of tea, of coffee, overflow from deep cupboards . . . and piles of cheese, hogsheads of lard, sacks of flour, barrels of vinegar, cases of biscuits . . . and all this carefully guarded, after four years of famine, while in the garrets and hospitals of the town children and old people faded out in thousands, victims of hunger.

Long lines of hams, looped rings of smoked sausages, fitches of bacon now hang over our heads; room follows room, pile follows pile. . . . I see sweetmeats and chocolates from Vevey and Lucerne, Quaker oats from Baltimore, caviare from the Volga . . . jams and preserves of brands made in London and Liverpool; France has let sardines from Brest reach here, where they join salmon from Norway; and to season many of these good things there is Tarragon mustard from Neuilly-on-Seine. . . .¹

¹ Paul Gentizon: *La Révolution Allemande*, Payot, Paris, pp.139-41.

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The existence of these stores cannot have been widely known but the sort of table kept by the royal family must have been a forceful example of how to maintain one's own morale in war-time. The German officers did not need Scheer's instructions to awareness of their own "rights" with this example before them.

This contrast between officers and men made of all their privations a class issue, a question of politics and class power, that united all discontents into a political movement. This movement, in the eyes of its exponents and its enemies, was cardinal in the ending of the war. Admiral Scheer wrote bitterly, after the war had ended in revolution: "The navy must bear the shame of having nourished within it, and then spread outside it, the revolution." He was right. And we have given the greater part of this chapter to the earlier, smaller, "unsuccessful" mutiny of 1917 because it shows the causes, methods, background of the mutiny that in 1918 did more than any other series of acts, on the German side of the battle-lines, to bring the war to an end. If it had not been for Sachse, Köbis and Reichpietsch in 1917, and the stokers and crews that they led, taught them their power, the German Fleet might have gone into action in October 1918 and won another "victory" such as that of Jutland—a useless success, and very limited, but enough to give hope again, and rouse again last efforts to "hold out" through the winter. Ludendorff's plan was to

fall back with the armies to the German border,¹ and November 1918 might have seen not Armistice but the opening of a fifth winter of war, the armies mud-clogged, hunger and the guns still taking their toll. The work of these mutineers saved the world that agony.

The story of the mutiny of 1918 can be told most vividly by a sailor on one of the destroyers ordered into action to crush the mutiny. This anonymous letter, printed a few weeks after the events described, in a German Social-Democratic newspaper,² covers the first half of the mutiny:

Big things have happened in the Imperial Navy, the crews of the ships of the line and of the armoured cruisers have mutinied. . . .

¹ Ludendorff had a nervous breakdown when he realized in September 1918 that the German armies were defeated. (His nerves and the war's strain on nerves are mentioned continually in his Memoirs; his critics say that his nervous breakdown first showed itself at Tannenberg in 1914.) By October he had recovered and was planning the continuation of the war on the lines stated. The plan was rejected and Ludendorff forced to resign by those who had caught the contagion of his breakdown; but the plan was still possible—if mutinies did not occur in the German forces. Lloyd George admits in his memoirs that he was doubtful if Britain and France would have been able to continue into 1919 if the Germans evacuated France and Belgium, and quotes a reasoned statement by Haig, made on October 19th, 1918, which describes Germany as able to hold a defensive line on or near the frontier "for some time after the campaign of 1919 commences". This was an alternative to accepting armistice terms which amounted to surrender, and as an alternative it remained open to the rulers of Germany until the sailors mutinied.

² The *Bergische Arbeiterstimme*; we translate from the French version given in Paul Gentizon's *La Révolution Allemande*, Payot, Paris, 1919, p. 218.

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Our flotilla (of destroyers) had been out for some time, on reconnaissance in the North Sea, and had been near the English a good many times. By this and other signs we rather thought something was up. Then, a few days ago, when we were coming in, we saw outside Wilhelmshafen the German fleet, the big ships and the destroyers, at anchor and we hove to alongside them. . . . Suddenly the story spread that the fleet commander was wanting to do some big manœuvres in the Gulf (the area round Heligoland) but no one was taken in by this silliness.

The first orders were sent out on the Wednesday night; soon after, it was postponed to the Thursday. We, out of it all, didn't know what was happening; we heard whispers of a riot and a revolt but we didn't believe them. Yesterday the order came: "B97 and B112 (the other ship in our half-flotilla) to be at our disposal at 8 o'clock: Commander, 1st Squadron." The admiral came aboard . . . then the commander of our half-flotilla had us up on deck and made us a speech that I'll never forget as long as I live. Regrettable things had happened in the squadrons, crews of different ships had refused to obey; when the fleet should have put to sea, crews had taken the battle fire-extinguishers and put out the fires in the stokeholds; whatever orders were given they did that sort of thing, and so they had prevented the fleet sailing. When asked for explanations they were answering that they didn't want to disobey any orders but they would not agree to sail, at any price; they wouldn't take part in the supreme battle of the German fleet;¹ it was being said by the "heads": "before we surrender the fleet let us stake all on one card; rather than hand over our fine

¹ The sailor writing this letter has obviously been carried away from his commander's speech, and is describing the news and rumours that reached him later.

fleet to the English, we prefer to see it entirely destroyed." The commander of the S.M.S. *Thuringen* had said: "We'll fire our two thousand shells to the last one and sink with the flag flying"; his men had answered that he could go and do it alone. That is when the whole business blew up.¹ The situation was worst on the *Thuringen* and the *Heligoland*, of the first squadron. The rebels had barricaded themselves on the foredeck; on the *Heligoland* they had got hold of three guns. I can't give you in detail the speech of our commander; he told us just that we had been chosen to restore order and that, if duty demanded, we must use our arms against our comrades.

I can't tell you what our feelings were; we got ready machine guns, guns, and torpedo tubes, and came up to within two hundred metres of the *Thuringen*. Meanwhile, a steamer with two hundred and fifty marines on board had come out from the port, they were to be escorts for the men who had mutinied; it was in case the latter would not tranship onto the steamer that the B97 would have to fire.

My dear father, if you only knew what a hopeless rage got hold of me when we had trained our guns on our comrades. . . . But, an hour later, the men in revolt gave up the game and flew a Red Cross flag. About six hundred men agreed to go onto the steamer; what a relief to us, we were only a hair's breadth off it. . . .

On the *Heligoland* and the other ships the row had quietened down, the aim was won, the fleet will not go out; we'll suffer, of course, for what has happened, but our time's coming; peace will have to be made soon, or we'll make it ourselves. The fleet is out of the game now; if only the army and people would follow its lead. . . .

¹ Here our author returns, it is clear, to his account of the commander's speech.

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The squadrons were moving to their rendezvous outside the Jade, on October 29th, when on some vessels of the Third Squadron stokers came up on deck, having drawn fires. But with the steam available from other fires the vessels reached their anchorage. Crews were told that the fleet must put out to help the submarines reach port. (Unrestricted submarine war had been ended.) In fact, submarine flotillas had sailed three days earlier, to take position near the English coast. An operation was planned that would bring raiding squadrons to the mouth of the Thames, with the High Seas Fleet and the submarines disposed to draw the Grand Fleet on to battle on "prepared ground" near Terschelling.¹ It was a carefully prepared ambush for Beatty; it had some chance of success, in spite of the strengthening of the Grand Fleet by American squadrons. But it was quite natural that among officers in the mess and men between decks it should seem almost suicidal, a last fling of the dice. Toasting the "Day" now known to be near them, officers aware of Germany's desperate plight seem to have made hysterical boasts, talked of sinking with the flag flying. . . . Sailors, nerves on edge, ready for mutiny for other reasons, for all the reasons we have given, heard or hear of these boasts. Their first action came to nothing. It served only to postpone the fleet's sortie: Admiral von

¹ Operations and Orders, No. 19, dated 24th October, 1918, from the *Kaiser Wilhelm II*; see Charles Vidil, *Les Mutineries de la Marine Allemande*, Payot, Paris, pp. 152-4.

Hipper decided that he would sail. Then the mutinies broke out again, on the *Thuringen* and the *Heligoland* and to a less extent on the other vessels. Destroyers and a submarine were brought to threaten the mutineers, and might have been used. (Lieutenant Spiers of submarine U35 wrote later that "if they had cleaned up the foredeck of the *Thuringen* with a few shells, discipline would at once have been restored to the fleet".) But the mutineers surrendered, were transhipped for prison. Now the fleet could sail—but the admiral decided to go back to port. The strain had told, as it told on Ludendorff. The squadrons would be scattered, to prevent the development of further mutinies; the process of court-martial, disciplinary punishments, inquiries, was to begin again; war against the mutineers—but a postponement of the war against England. The decision was thought curious by those surrounding the admiral who knew the stakes in play; they did not know that the admiral was "playing politics"—was so imbued with hatred for the new "left" politicians (including Schiedemann and another Social-Democrat) who were now the Government of Germany that he wished to be able to say: "You stabbed us in the back: your intrigues amongst our crews made it impossible for us to use the fleet in battle." (That was and is the claim to-day of reaction in Germany, of Hitler's Government.) He did not continue his "raid", even when the mutiny seemed ended, because this mutiny

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was—he hoped—a trump card to play against Schiedemann and company. Nowak writes:¹

Until then they (the naval officers) had known only one enemy within the country, the Social-democrats. Now Philip Schiedemann, who had always been portrayed to them as Satan personified, whom they in fact never called anything but “Satan”, had been named suddenly Imperial Secretary of State in the Cabinet of Prince Max. They didn’t know, either who was this prince, nibbling little by little at all the Emperor’s rights. Everything was upside down in their ideas. They were serving now the Emperor and Scheidemann.

Admiral von Hipper thought, perhaps he was serving the Emperor by laying a mine in Schiedemann’s course. His decision to bring back his fleet to harbour was the “admiral’s mutiny” of which Socialists wrote in Germany after the war.

But even if the admiral had not “mutinied”, if he had not given up the war, it is unlikely that he could have got his squadrons across the North Sea. The crews were almost leaderless; every revolutionary with any experience was in jail; the organization built up in 1917 had been destroyed. But the pressure of anger and despair was there, and the order to sail from the roadstead would have meant new outbreaks. It has been argued that these could have been suppressed by the use of “loyal” ships, but we have seen in the letter from a lad on B97

¹ K. F. Nowak, *Les Dessous de la Révolution*, Paris, quoted by Vidil, p. 173.

what was the feeling on these "loyal" ships about firing on their fellows.

The order to return to port, and the scattering of the squadrons, led to results the admiral cannot have expected. His pretence that he was forced to do this—it was a pretence, though a few hours might have made it a reality—was an attempt to strike at a political party; the blow miscarried and helped to destroy a navy. For the mutineers felt their power and on the evening of November 1st, when the Third and Fourth Squadrons anchored at Kiel, there was scarcely a man on board who was not thinking of leave ashore. Leave was given though not to very many. At once a party of sailors went to the local trade union headquarters and others held political meetings in the streets. The speeches were vague, but coloured with new hopes: the war was ending. "These fine speeches", says Vidil, "did not inveigh against discipline; they caused it to be forgotten. What use was the service, what use the squadrons now that there would be no more war, and all the peoples were going to fraternize together?"¹ Men could not leave these meetings, listening to the new words and drinking in the new hopes was the only thing they wanted to do. So some were late, returning from leave; some did not return at all. Patrols were sent out and rounded up a hundred sailors, who went into the ships' cells; but these were already overcrowded

¹ Charles Vidil, *Les Mutineries de la Marine Allemande*, p. 157.

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with men from the previous mutinies. A company of marines ("riflemen seamen") was called on board the ships of the Third Squadron to escort men from the cells to forts on shore and refused to obey orders. But a second company obeyed.

On Saturday, November 2nd the streets of Kiel boiled over: arsenal workers, women, sailors from the barracks and the depots and in the afternoon the "liberty men" of the fleet—all made a sort of political Bank Holiday in the streets. The biggest rally was on a parade-ground, where a stoker called Artelt suggested that the prisoners ought to be let out. The trade union headquarters were guarded by a picket, and no one tried to force their way in. Nothing was done about the release of the prisoners; two companies of infantry, sent rather late to clear away the largest meeting, found the parade-ground empty. The night was calm.

At two next day, Sunday, the flooding of the streets began again. More "liberty men" were present, for the admirals dared not refuse the usual extended Sunday leave. More men were in the streets from the barracks, and when the Governor of the town, Admiral Souchon, decided that they must be recalled, the patrols he sent out had no effect. At five p.m. on the parade-ground, the meeting was bigger than the day before. There was still no leadership for action from the speakers, but when one of them, a trade union leader called Garbe, was repeating his warnings, his exhortations

to prudence, hecklers in the crowd began to shout about hesitations, about the need "to get our comrade prisoners out". The meeting moved off, almost at once, to do this; caught up with it new hundreds from the streets; disarmed a patrol near the railway station; and came at a turn of the road face to face with a stronger patrol commanded by a first lieutenant. After warning, he ordered shots to be fired over the heads of the crowd, who still came on. Then he ordered his men to fire on the crowd, who had among them armed men, mainly soldiers from the local barracks who wanted to see what was happening. Eight of the crowd were killed and twenty-nine wounded and most of it scattered; but soldiers and a few sailors with rifles returned the fire. The thirty sailors of the patrol, standing in ranks, were soon either killed or wounded by riflemen scattered behind cover; the first to fall was Lieutenant Stenhauser. And with these shots riot became revolution. Next day the town was in the hands of a Council of Soldiers' deputies whose first demands were the release of the prisoners, abdication of the Hohenzollerns—and votes for women! The first propagandist groups from Kiel set out to conquer the remains of the old regime in Germany. As they were leaving Kiel the Social-Democratic leader Gustav Noske reached the city to restore order.

There was scarcely any opposition to the little groups of sailors who went boldly to the big towns,

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and even towards the front; in Hamburg officers tried to defend a barracks and there were ten killed; in most other towns the old regime collapsed as masses of people came on to the streets to welcome a dozen sailors bearing Kiel's message. At Berlin the general in charge of the city placarded an announcement:

Certain groups are planning in violation of the laws, to form Councils of workers and soldiers on the Russian model. Such institutions are in opposition to the State regulations and threaten public safety. I forbid, in virtue of article 96 of the law on the state of siege, the organization of such meetings and any participation in them.
von Linsingen, *Generaloberst.*

Two days later the councils were formed, and declared a general strike to enforce abdication of the Emperor. Four hours after this proclamation by about noon on November 9th, the garrison of Berlin was known to be on their side.

The German armies, proud and disciplined, were not in mutiny; but they had been so strained by their fight against half the world, and so affected by new ideas, that they followed the lead given by Kiel; councils of soldiers sprang up throughout Germany, and the troops played a considerable part in the short-lived Soviet republic in Bavaria. General Hoffman, who commanded on the Eastern front, was probably right when he attributed the breakdown of the armies largely to the gigantic battles of the summer of 1918.

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The communists and socialists, [he wrote] had used every expedient to undermine the morale of the troops . . . in the spring of 1918 this agitation had not had any great effect on the troops at the Front. On the lines of communications the position was worse. The poison that was being spread there penetrated at first but slowly into the troops at the Front, and it was only under the influence of the severe fighting during the summer of 1918 that the decay set in, which brought about the disintegration of the proudest army that has ever been known in the history of the world.¹

We cannot trace here the course of the German revolution, Noske's work in Kiel and Berlin defeating the Spartakus-Bund, the days of mid-January 1919 when "whether or not Bolshevism got the upper hand in Berlin hung by a hair".² As we know to-day, the revolution went a very different way from that in Russia. But the sailors' mutiny that began it achieved its first aims, peace and the release of the prisoners. Young Sachse, condemned to fifteen years rigorous jail, had seen one of his fellow seamen die of hunger, slowly, in prison; had eaten wood shavings; had suffered eighty days punishment-cell, dry bread and water, for hitting a prison chaplain who insulted the dead man, Fischer. His prison window showed only the sky, and, if he stood on a stool, a canal along which big ships sometimes passed. One morning before the prison woke, at daybreak, he was at his window

¹ Major General Max Hoffman, *War Diaries*, London. 1929, Vol. II, p. 231.

² Hoffman, Vol. II, p. 348.

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when a ship's siren hooted strangely; a few moments later the vessel came under the bridge along the canal, and it was flying a red flag. That day two sailors wearing red brassards came to Rendsburg prison; he was free.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE DARK SEA



IN July 1914, *Monsieur le Président* Poincaré reached St. Petersburg to meet and to embrace the Tsar, to inspect the ranged nobility, the white-tunic cadets, "this Kingdom and this Glory and this Power and this Pride". The great battleship on which he came to that ominous pageant was the *France*.

In April 1919 a French battleship steamed from the coast of Southern Russia, heading home. On the bridge were officers, but they gave no orders. The only orders were those given by the crew's four delegates. Routine duties of navigation were performed by officers in the chart room but a representative of the crew directed the men controlling the helm. All the organization of the "inner life" of the ship was directed by a quartermaster, representing the delegates. This vessel, first to revolt of the French fleet in the Black Sea, was the *France*.

The crew had mutinied, refused to obey orders, on a very simple, ordinary question. The ship was at Sevastopol. Coaling had to be done, a job hated

by every member of every crew that ever sailed in steam. The crew were ordered to prepare to coal ship to-morrow—and to-morrow was Easter Sunday. The crew's first act, 400 excited sailors at an impromptu meeting on the foredeck, was to shout "no coaling to-morrow, none on Easter Monday!" The captain came forward, and was met with shouts and the singing of the "International". He and the other officers went back to the quarter-deck, armed themselves. Uselessly; this was only the beginning, but it could not be put down by force.

The *France* had not touched at a French port since October 9th, 1916, two and a half years before. It had spent a large part of those years at Corfu, base of the French squadron in the Eastern Mediterranean, where—writes a member of a destroyer's crew:

it was a prison life . . . nerve wracking monotony, incessant repair work, maintenance work, alterations to the ship, alternating with drill. Fatigues of all sorts, among them the loathed coaling, came one on top of the other. The food was usually uneatable. Leave ashore was given once or twice a week: small punishments, confinement on board, held sailors on ships for months on end, the shore only half a mile away. . . . And while the sailors suffered, tired out, nerve-worn and hungry, they saw a few yards from them officers living well, spending their afternoons ashore in the company of their families or of *demi-mondaines*.¹

The *France* was at Corfu, its crew exasperated by

¹ André Marty: *La Revolte de la Mer Noire*, Paris, 1932.

long exile, on the 11th November, 1918. The men rejoiced; they stirred with the certainty: now it will not be long. Now for home, for Marseilles, for leave, for demobilization! On the 8th December they sailed for the Black Sea.

The German troops who had overrun the Ukraine were going home. Along the coast, in some areas, shadowy squabbling governments, administrations, local bandit leaders took temporary power. At other points came the Red Guards and partisans who had been harrying and raiding the Germans for many months. The *France* ploughed for a month or two along that January coastline. Corfu saw her again on March 3rd, 1919. This time, surely this time, they were for home. No; at the end of March the battleship headed north again. When the news spread that it was to be used for war against the Soviets, anger spread with it.

At Odessa, the crew of the *France*, already short-handed, had to work coaling the passenger vessels in which frightened members of the Russian upper classes were bribing their way to exile. Then near Sevastopol came orders to put down a barrage to prevent Red troops advancing. Most of the men, warned, went to the crew's lavatories, crowded them, locked the doors, hid in other parts of the ship. There was difficulty in getting guns' crews together; but the officers succeeded. The shelling went on all night long.

Admiral Amet, who had made a little speech to

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the crew the day before, had told them that Bolsheviks were "abominable bandits", was leaving the ship, the morning after the shelling. Seamen started first making audible and "unpleasant" remarks, then whistled—as only the French can—shouted. Four of them were arrested, put in the ship's cells; among them was a tall youth, Vuillemin. Two days later was Easter Sunday, and the mutiny began. Then it spread to other ships, and the crew of the *France* got in touch with them—not by cheering as in English mutinies—but by singing.

As happened often in these outbreaks, the crew did not elect delegates till they were told to do so by an officer who wanted someone with whom to negotiate. The crew were storming through the decks of the *France*, the evening after the mutiny broke out, arguing, releasing those imprisoned in the ship's cells, pulling canvas covers off the windows of officers' quarters, to see if the officers were preparing to come out and attack. Most of the officers stayed in their quarters, but one, *Capitaine de frégate* de Kermoal stopped a group near an accommodation-ladder on the port side of the ship; he asked them what they wanted. Too many spoke at once: he could not hear or make himself heard. He told them to elect three or four of their number who should come to see him in the morning. They reminded him of men who had complained before, and got thirty days cells. He promised there should be no "sanctions" against the men designated—

"*parole d'honneur.*" They chose Vuillemin, a young, round, sensitive face under a dark beret, straight from the dark cell, and with him an engineer and a seaman.

By ten that night two delegates from the *France* had gone on board the *Jean-Bart*, another dreadnought in the harbour. The "International" was sung, and the crew began electing their own delegates. It was going like a house afire—very like.

While the delegates were moving in a steam pinnace, "nationalized" for the occasion, round the harbour, trying other vessels where they got no response or were told to sheer off, Admiral Amet, commanding the fleet, reached the *France*. Beside the gun turret, aft, the crew ranged to hear him. He began with words that cost him his authority and nearly cost him his life: "There are among this crew two hundred unworthy Frenchmen!" The crew swayed forward, there were cries, openly calling him tyrant, crying out that he should be killed: "*enlevez-le! A mort!*"

He changed theme quickly, talked of Bolshevism. This was a subject in which the sailors were so interested they would listen, for a time, to anyone. But when the familiar talk began about bandits—"bandit yourself!" came the answer: "He's lying—*ta gueule*—put a sock in it!"

He tried again, more gently. "*Mes enfants,*" he began, "my children . . ." and contrived a sob in his voice. Some roughneck commented: "Fine time

for him to say his prayers, this!" They just would not hear him. Rather late, and rather lamely, he asked: "What is it you want?" The remaining delegate, Notta, a solid seaman with a big black moustache, black hair, told him: "No coaling Easter Sunday or Monday, no more war on Russians, return to France, leave, less punishment, better food, better postal service (they had been three months, sometimes, without letters), and demobilization on the scale published in Paris."

This was a whole programme. The admiral flinched. But the delegate went on; nothing had been forgotten. Strength of the crew to be brought up to establishment (700 men were doing the work of 1100; they were overworked), fewer kit inspections. . . . And after all this Notta began a political speech. "The war in Russia is unconstitutional. . . ."

The admiral foamed out sentences about the Red Army—and suddenly the crew left him there, on the after-deck; went forward and below. He threw after them: "You'll be sorry for this"; left the ship.

Soon after he left the delegates returned. There was little rest for them. In the small hours of the morning they hid from the questions, the excitement of the crew, in a torpedo tube compartment; there they drew up a proclamation: "Our demands are just; we shall succeed. . . . Avoid all violence, all *sabotage*." Vuillemin pinned it outside the ship's

canteen; a sentry was posted to see it stayed there. Then—curious effect of exhaustion, or desire to get sleep somewhere, away from the row?—Vuillemin went back to the ship's prison, to the cell from which he had been released.

Unhappy Admiral Amet probably slept less well in his stateroom than the mutineer in his cell. For when he got back to the *Jean-Bart*, his flagship, he was met by officers who reported that delegates had brought in demands on that vessel also. He refused to hear the demands, went out to speak to the crew. And they sang. They sang the "International". They sang rather well, for they had been practising; and the admiral's own band, the *musique* he was proud of, led the singing.

As on the *France* the officers were in hiding. Only the captain went freely among the crew: at Odessa he had jumped unluckily, fallen in the sea with an arm broken; a sailor had taken the risk of diving in, between mole and boat, to his rescue; he had in gratitude done all he could for the crew.

Presumably without his orders, members of his staff had done a recklessly foolish thing. They had brought on deck barrels of wine; the intention was clear. The mutineers put sentries over these barrels, and even threw overboard the mugs placed invitingly beside them.

On Easter morning the crews slept late. When they turned out, the coffee given them was coffee, and had sugar in it.

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The time came, that morning, in bright sunlight and a south wind, when by all the Navy's traditions the ship's colours are broken out before the crew. The crew ranked as usual. The flag hoisted was a plain square of red.

There, on the bowsprit of the *France*—for that is the French custom—was a flag to be seen by all the ships in the long roadstead, to be seen by keen eyes ashore, where the revolutionary committee prepared feverishly for the day when Sevastopol would be joined to the rest of the Soviet country. And the crew were dressed as usual to salute it. Something was happening.

The delegates broke away to see de Kermoal. He temporized, refused to talk to the crew until the red flag was run down. The flag was brought down—then run up again.

The previous evening, along the quays and jetties near the *France*, there had been more people than usual. They had been listening, watching, talking rumours. This morning there was a crowd. Among the crowd were many groups of sailors landed from various ships as shore parties for the defence of the town. Little boats put out, went past the battleship, came closer. Men on the *France* called them inboard and gave them messages for other French ships.

A Russian dinghy rowed by two young workmen was at the bows of the *France*, receiving a message. Round the stem came a steam pinnace, manned by officers and petty officers, bumped alongside the

dinghy, took it in tow. The idea was to tow her round to the accommodation-ladder, arrest and search the Russians. But on the deck of the *France* the crew were alert. They snatched up whatever could be lifted, dropped or flung down into the pinnace. Brooms and swabs rattled on its roof and deck. Lieutenant Barbier, revolver in hand, had to duck away from the tiller; he jumped forward just in time to be missed by an iron bar weighing nearly a hundredweight that came past his head. The captain shouted to him to cast off the tow; the dinghy went landwards, fast. The to and fro of little boats, after a pause, began again; and there was no further attempt to stop it.

Again the admiral came aboard. This time he began with "*Mes enfants*". This time they called him "old pig" as well as fancy things like "tyrant" and "blood-sucker". The admiral quit, but the crew was restless, on the edge of some action—they did not know what—until at 10.15 a.m. the cooks announced a four course Easter dinner, roast pork, haricot beans, salad, cheese, sardines. Before they went cheering down to this, the men lowered the red flag: it must not fall into the hands of the officers. At their dinner the wine ration was doubled, and the men smoked.

What is important in a meal, when your ship has mutinied? Why name the courses? Because this, however small, was change and victory. It was assurance, after all those years of monotony, that

change could happen, victory be won. The officers, if they ordered it—and it is not clear who ordered that dinner—made a mistake: it did not send the crew to sleep; it gave them new heart, hope. The delegates, if they ordered it, showed skill in the tactics of revolt, gave those who followed them a taste of success, something to whet their appetites.

Before, the men had been nervous, angry; after, they were enthusiastic.

And at dinner-time Vuillemin had been officially released, on the captain's orders, from his cell.

After dinner a letter came from the crew of the *Jean-Bart*. "Weve been given satisfaction; were goin back to duty." The delegates looked at it sideways: do we spell like that? It's queer. They decided the message had been sent by an officer. Probably it had been; but in fact the captain of the *Jean-Bart*, having the ear of his men, had persuaded them to quieten down. He had given his word of honour that they would go back to France soon, very soon. There would be no punishment if the red flag was brought to him. Theatrically he cut a scrap from it: "I'll keep this as a memento: do the same." The flag was torn to pieces by the men who had hoisted it; each man who could seized a scrap.

A heath fire goes out here, breaks out there. On smaller vessels the sparks had been landing; they caught. And the men allowed or taking shore leave from the *France*, after dinner, spread the news to the detachments ashore. By four o'clock there were

delegations aboard the *France* from the *Spartis* and the *Du Chayla*, to find out all about it.

A very curious incident arose from the appearance of the red flag at the bows of the *France*. A letter came from a commander of French troops on shore; it was addressed to "The Government of the Soviet Republic on board the battleship *France*!" This gentleman had, apparently, concluded that the *France* had been taken over by representatives of the Russian Government. After discussing the matter with the crew, Vuillemin handed the letter to the captain of the vessel, who went pale at what he read. But we shall never know what was in that letter, unless it turns up some day in some Paris archives.

The crew of the *France* believed, and still believe, that Admiral Amet had given orders for the ship to be blown up if control could not be recovered. They posted double sentries at all necessary points inside and outside the stores of explosives.

And at 5 p.m. the men came back from leave. They told an appalling story.

As soon as the leave boats had reached the quays, the men tumbled out, held meetings, decided to hold a demonstration, began marching. Others gathered with them; they took the main street, named after Catherine the Great, Ekaterinskaia. Russian workers flooded round and behind them, gave them red ribands. Outside a trade union headquarters they paused, were given a red flag:

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at other points they paused for little speeches. It was partly a demonstration such as those which march in many cities on May Day, partly a stroll round town seeing the sights, a Bank Holiday expedition. Three thousand people turned off the Ekaterinskaia, of which two hundred to three hundred were sailors. There were a few from every vessel in the fleet. A French patrol or two appeared: sailors of the landing forces. A few propped their rifles against the house-walls, slipped off their cartridge belts and joined in.

They turned right again, still in a main street, parallel to the harbour or partly on the way back to it. An officer who tried to drive through the crowd in a car got a bad shaking-up. Otherwise there was no violence, and none of the marchers were armed.

Outside a big pharmacy, Mallers, a French officer tried to hold up things. He asked that the red flag be handed over to him. He insisted; voices were raised; he got a push in the ribs, and retreated. At once, without challenge or warning, a crackle of rifles and the terrifying stutter of machine guns began, from a carefully chosen position where the road dipped a little. The riflemen were Greek conscripts, but the machine-gun squad was French, commanded by an ensign from the *Jean Bart*.

It was an ambush, perfectly laid.

Men flung themselves into the shops, particularly the pharmacy, into the cellar doorways up the

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street, into side-streets. And men lay still on the pavement.

The firing ended: sailors and civilians were lifted into the pharmacy. An officer with a French patrol had the courage to enter the pharmacy for a moment. Sailors growled: "Yes, come and look at your work!"

Three civilian corpses were there: three others died later, including a girl of 16, Thais Mouracheva. Among the severely wounded was a woman of 23. In addition two French sailors were dead, and four mortally wounded, among them a quartermaster, probably from the *Escaut*. The dead were buried at night, by Senegalese troops. There were many wounded. . . .

The red flag was picked up by two Russian workers, torn from its pole and hidden. It hangs to-day in the offices of the Seamen's Union in Sevastopol. And outside what used to be the *Pharmacie Maller* there is to-day a monument to French sailors and Russian workers who were killed by the same machine guns. The French admiral, by whose orders leave was given to the sailors, and the Greeks posted, and the machine-gun squad added to them, had found an efficient formula for establishing friendship and understanding between the mutineers and the "Red" workers of Sevastopol. It may not have been his intention; but it was the result.

On board the *France*, Vuillemin demanded to see

the captain. The officer of the watch saw him, and consulted the captain. It was agreed that Vuillemin should write to the admiral, in the name of the crew demanding an enquiry into the shooting and the punishment of those guilty. It was agreed that the captain should write a covering letter making the same request.

That evening the officer who had ordered the machine guns to fire committed suicide.

The machine gunners of the *Jean-Bart*, from the landing party, did not go back to their ship. They were put on board a hospital ship and sent home. Just as well, for a notice had been posted in the gun-room of the *Jean-Bart*: "If the sergeant-at-arms comes aboard, he'll be hung!" He might have been.

That evening, on the *France*, delegates from the army came to discuss plans. An adjutant—not a commissioned rank in the French Army—a sergeant, two corporals and two privates; their request was that the army should not be left behind. If the fleet had made up its mind to go home, let them come too. Ten vessels were in port, available for them. . . . The promise was given.

The crews felt themselves stronger, more determined. The officers were distraught. The men demanded the right to communicate freely with those on the *Jean-Bart*. The captain, unable to dissuade them, took off his cap at the end of the interview. "I have grown fifteen years older in these four days" he said quietly. His hair was white.

"And for four days I haven't been able to sleep."

The representatives of the crew remembered that he had come out of his cabin to meet them with the marks of tears on his face. One turned away and ordered a boat to be lowered, the officers' gig, to go across to the *Jean-Bart*. It was lowered; but Vuillemin suggested that the journey could wait till morning, when the crew of the *Jean-Bart* could see them approaching.

Vuillemin had to suffer that evening. He was asked by the captain to come and see him. An arm-chair was offered in the captain's cabin; he refused this, and refused a cigarette. He remained standing from 9-30 to 12-30, listening to the complaints, the weary repeated arguments of this broken man; answering also.

After hesitant threats, promises, and argument, the captain repeated "on his word of honour" that there would be no punishment for the crew. "All the same, I'll never forgive the men who hoisted that red flag." . . . Vuillemin, tired, became curt. "You have no right to give your word of honour on this. You have superior officers. If one of them disapproves, your word will have no value." The captain gave another promise; then feebly: "But isn't it shameful that a young man of 18 should come and lay down the law to a man of 53, old enough to be his father?" Vuillemin answered that he was there as delegate of the crew, bowed, and left the old man so conscious of his age. In mutinies

there are other casualties besides those who fall before the command's machine guns.

Next day, an English battleship, the *Emperor of India*, was rumoured to be preparing to deal with the *France*. Vuillemin ordered the twelve-inch guns of the *France* to be cleared for action; live shells were brought up to the turrets.

Meanwhile on shore evacuation was really beginning. Munitions, guns, machine guns were tipped off the water front. Dumps went up; queer black cauliflowers of smoke, a drawn-out thud, and tons of ammunition crackling, flaring. Dynamite was being used to destroy foodstuffs. Russia was hungry, but the food was not for "Reds".

Vuillemin, during that night, had been immobilized; but the other delegates, and the crew, were very much on the alert. The ship was in a state of defence against a possible outbreak by the officers or an attack on it by other vessels or from the shore. Every quarter of an hour during the night the searchlights of the *France* swept along the mole and the quays, felt their way past the other vessels down the roadstead, watchful, awake.

Next day the crews sang, were impatient, but did little. Delegates went to the *Jean-Bart* to see the admiral and to repeat their demand: the *France* to sail for home. In the end his decision was: the *France* should sail on the 23rd, but alone. The other ships would stay to see the evacuation through. He promised that all the Fleet would sail by the 28th.

The *France* coaled. An ensign, officer of the watch, ordered the men to begin the job. He was told roughly to go aft and not come back and he obeyed. Vuillemin directing the coaling, saw to the repair of davits and slings that were out of action. The coal came on board at a hundred and twenty tons an hour, more than the crew had ever previously handled. By six in the evening the ship was clean. At 8.30 that evening, the 22nd, Vuillemin was sent for. In the captain's cabin were three officers, each with a revolver apparent. "Vuillemin, the ship must weigh!" "No," said Vuillemin. And to repeated orders he answered "no". They, the crew, had given promises to the soldiers, to other crews. He was afraid of the arrangement reached with the admiral, doubly afraid now that the sailing was advanced by twelve hours. Might not some trap be laid for them? On the other hand, pressing in the lad's mind, conflicting with these feelings and fears, was the desire to go back to France, a desire not only his but mingled with the desires of all the crew. This longing was so considerable, its pressure so great, that Vuillemin had been caught up in it despite the promises given to other ships and to troops on shore, and had allowed the deputation to go to the admiral. Now he was at the point where leadership of revolt is most difficult; where it is necessary if the revolt is to develop successfully for the leaders of a powerful group to oppose the immediate interests of that group for the sake of the interests of all who are in

revolt. Vuillemin hesitated over this, and in the end said he would not influence the men for or against sailing: let the crew decide. A leader convinced of his usefulness does let his followers decide at each emergency or critical point, but he also puts before them, with all the power he has, his own views, proposals, warnings. Vuillemin remained silent when the matter was debated.

The officers called in two other delegates of the crew, who agreed to make immediate preparations for sailing. But few members of the watch turned out during the night, and at 6.30 a.m. the crew met in excitement and indecision.

Notta, solid and simple: "We want to go back home to France. Here's the order given to sail. It isn't logic to refuse. . . ." Members of the crew realized that the dreadnought was to sail alone, protested and called for Vuillemin. Very pale, looking tired out and trembling a little, he refused to reply. The other delegates carried the day: the *France* got up steam.

At ten that morning the *France* sailed.

Constantinople, the Aegean Sea, went by without incident. On April 29th, six days from Sevastopol, the ship was at the entrance to the French port of Bizerta, on the African coast, where—the crew had been told—it was to coal. The order came to march the crew ashore; the captain revealed that they would be sent to a fortress; this meant imprisonment.

Vuillemin answered: "I have preached calm, till

now. Now I preach revolt!" And he gave orders to man the twelve-inch guns and the quick-firing guns, to fire on the forts if they took action and on any vessel that tried to come too close to the *France*. The captain gave in; the ship remained where it was, in quarantine.

Then three days' inaction. The energy of the crew seemed insufficient to devise new means of demonstration and advance; they did not repeat the history of Sevastopol. A few of them, led by a stormy energetic fellow, Fracchia, tried to do so, but Vuillemin quietened them down with the statement that an official government court of inquiry would be held on the ship at once, before anyone went on leave. For the captain was now dangling before the crew the promise of leave—in France—for many of them; they should cross in the next vessel sailing. . . . It was an obvious attempt to divide them. And the older men wanted not leave but demobilization.

The commission of inquiry met, and took evidence from officers and men. It reported:

regrettable effacement of the commanders, but beneficent results of the intervention of the sailors chosen by the crew, influencing their comrades and leading them to calm and work. . . . No sabotage, no violence, thanks to this influence. . . . Nothing in this movement seems to have been prepared, deliberate" (*voulu*).

The officers were blamed severely for inertia. The fifth clause of the commission's conclusions reads: "The four delegates had nothing to do with the

organization of the movement; they were selected, and had a useful influence. No charges can be laid against them."

The commission proposed that twenty-three sailors should be put into disciplinary training classes ashore.¹ Otherwise no punishment of the crew was recommended, and the demobilization of the older men was advised, together with long leave for all who had been away from France for eighteen months or over.

News of these latter recommendations spread, and the crew cheered the posting of lists, covering the majority of the crew, for forty-five days leave. But from Paris an order had come: arrest the twenty-three ringleaders, in spite of any risk of an incident. And a few moments before the leave boats came alongside the twenty-three were called forward one by one, arrested by armed officers, and put into a decked vessel moored by the officers' accommodation ladder. Troops took them to barrack cells.

Vuillemin and the other delegates whose names were on the leave list had asked de Kermoal to state their position; he again gave his word of honour that there would be no prosecutions against them. This declaration was then written out and signed by the captain. But after they had enjoyed a week's leave the delegates were recalled to their depots by telegram, arrested and sent to barrack cells. To the

¹ *Compagnies de discipline*, later called *sections spéciales*. This is a punishment, but not necessarily a heavy one.

twenty-three and the four delegates a few others were added later. And after six months in jail thirty-three sailors of the *France* were tried at Toulon by court martial.

They were all accused of a "plot against the authority of the captain"; fifteen of "seizing the vessel"; one—Lechevallier—of "outrage by insult on a superior". He had cried: "put a sock in it" ("*ta gueule!*") to Admiral Amet.

The accused, with one exception, were in fine fighting mood. But the captain of the *France*, making a long statement, wept at frequent intervals. He asked for "indulgence" for the delegates; "they had saved the honour of the French flag."

It was Gauthier de Kermoal, who had given his word of honour at such frequent intervals, who was venomous against the accused.

Fifteen years imprisonment was given to one man, Fracchia, the most fiery in speech and deed. Vuillemin got five years, other delegates five or three. A total of ninety-five years prison, for twenty-six men condemned; seven were set free.

Unceasing, violent, irresistible, the campaign for their release, in the Press and the parties, from platforms and Parliamentary seats, went on until the men had been let out of jail. Few served more than half their sentences. It took two to four years to secure the release of those with the heaviest sentences.

Vuillemin and his comrades had won part of their aims. They had reached home; they had helped

to stop the new war that was beginning on the Black Sea coast; they had led the procession of the Fleet back to their home ports. But "home" was, for them, for years, a prison cell. And the war they had wanted ended was continued—not with troops and battleships, but by the supply of money and arms to hapless generals of the Tsarist army—for some years. They had come near to achieving their desires, but a lack of contact, a lack of consciousness of what they were doing—absence of organization, of a party, of groups, absence of theory—these prevented their complete success. And on the other side of the medal the captain's tears and his first lieutenant's "word of honour" both did something towards securing for the officers, for the rulers of France, a way of ending the mutiny not, certainly, on their own terms, but on terms they could accept.

The story of the *France* has been told as fully as the scope of this book allows: it is given in greater detail in André Marty's account.¹ We have turned a searchlight on the *France* because its story is typical of a vast number of other mutinies, all much of the same sort, all rather isolated and sporadic, occurring among the troops and sailors in the Black Sea, at Bizerta, at French ports such as Toulon and Brest, and even as far away as the Pacific Ocean. They began before the *France* mutinied, the first refusal of

¹ *La Revolte de la Mer Noire*, Éditions Sociales Internationales, Paris.

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a battalion of infantry to march occurring on the Rumanian-Russian border at the end of January 1919. They went on after the "ringleaders" of the *France* were safe in prison, not ending till August 1919. The best way to give the reader a real impression of the scale of these mutinies and their scattered nature is to list the cases where revolts actually occurred, or numbers of men were arrested because a "plot" had been discovered. The dates given are in each case those on which the mutinies began or were "nipped in the bud".

The list is formidable:

58th Infantry, at Tiraspol, 30th January.

176th Infantry (a detachment) Kherson (Crimea) 4th March.

19th Field Artillery, Coildendorf (Ukraine), 5th April.

7th Engineers (a company), Odessa, 5th April.

Destroyer *Protet*, Galatz (Rumania), 10th April.

Battleship *France*, Sevastopol, 19th April.

„	<i>Jean-Bart</i>	„	„
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„	<i>Justice</i>	„	„
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„	<i>Vergniand</i>	„	„
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„	<i>Mirabeau</i>	„	„
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Sloop	<i>Algol</i>	„	„
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175th Infantry	„	„	„
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Cruiser *Waldeck-Rousseau* Odessa, 27th April.

Destroyer	<i>Mameluck</i>	„	„
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„	<i>Fanconneau</i>	„	„
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Cruiser *Bruix*, Tendra, 28th April.

4th Colonial Infantry, Bender (Bessarabia), 27th May.

37th	„	„	„	„	„	„
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Naval Ratings, Rochefort, 4th June.

M U T I N Y

Crews of the Fleet (in depots and on board) Toulon,
8th June.

Battleship *Provence* (flagship of Commander-in-Chief),
Toulon, 10th June.

Battleship *Condorcet*, Odessa, 11th June.

Companies of Colonial Infantry, Toulon, 11th June.

„ „ „ Artillery, „ „
112th Infantry „ „

143rd Colonial Artillery „ 12th June.

Ships' crews etc. in depots, Brest, 17th June.

Colonial troops „ 19th June.

Battleship *Voltaire*, Bizerta, 19th June.

Cruiser *Guichen*, Itea (Greece), 26th June.

„ *Diderot*, Beirut (Syria), 2nd August.

Destroyer *Touareg*, Odessa, 7th August.

Cruiser *d'Estrée*, Vladivostock, 13th August.

The first to mutiny were infantry men sent across the Rumanian frontier into Russian territory with the promise that they would not have to fight. Their division had marched from the Serbian front, suffering great hardship and without any supplies except those wrenched from hungry people, through ruined Bulgaria and Rumania. The battalion lay in the snow for hours in a half circle, outside Tiraspol, held up by machine guns of the Red Guards. Behind them some mountain guns pounded at the town.

As dusk fell, the 58th Infantry saw carriages and wagons leave the little town; it was still light enough for troops only half a mile away to see that these were crowded with women and children. Perhaps the officers commanding the artillery, well in the

rear, could not see this; perhaps, as the infantry believed, it was deliberate: the guns lifted range at once; shells began to fall on the pitiful group of sledges and rickety vehicles; nine vehicles were hit; women went stumbling, wading through the snow, calling to their children, across the desolate plain. The French infantry, as the dark fell, got up from the snow with their weapons turned towards the artillery: the latter, helped by some officers, had to haul their guns away hurriedly and fight a rear-guard action in the scrambling night. The infantry followed them back across the border, out of Russia.

Other troops, Poles, were rushed up and took Tiraspol. The 58th were ordered to move forward behind them, and refused. At length the regiment agreed, but only if the move was made by train. And in the first coach must ride the officers, "so that we can be sure there will be no fighting". At the doors of the next truck, full of troops, machine guns were lashed to cover the officers' coach.

The battalion was later disarmed and sent to break roads in Morocco.

Many of the troops who mutinied belonged to divisions that had mutinied in 1917; they had been sent to Salonika to "cool down" in the fever-rotten dusty heat of that front.

Incidents like that of Tiraspol spread all along the two hundred mile front that the French had established across the Ukraine, from Rumania to the Crimea, and led to the decision to withdraw

troops from most parts of the front and concentrate on the Crimea. A company of the 7th Engineers in Odessa, led by trade unionists from their own ranks, chased their officers out of their billets. Odessa was evacuated in appalling disorder.

It was at Odessa, with the guns of his ship trained on the town, that a decision to resist the war actively was first taken by André Marty, whose name is flushed with the Black Sea mutinies as their foremost representative and spokesman. His tale we shall turn to later.

The Crimea could not be cut off from "Red infection", and on April 16th and 17th the fleet lying there had to shell the outskirts of Sevastopol to keep back Soviet troops. On April 19th the *France* began and other battleships took up the mutiny we have in part described. Most of the other crews returned "to calm and order" when they had gained the promise that the fleet should sail for France not later than the 28th. Sevastopol was being evacuated with desperate haste.

Outside Odessa, now in Soviet hands, another French squadron remained moored, a threat. The sailors of the *Waldeck-Rousseau* mutinied; others followed; again the admiral had to yield to the demand that the squadron should sail for France. Here the men threatened more decisive action than was proposed by the crews at Sevastopol; they said "take us home, or we take the cruiser into the port of Odessa!" That would have meant handing over this floating weapon to the Bolsheviks, to the revolution.

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All the admiral could do was to scatter the "worst" vessels, sending off the *France* first, and try to scrape together, from all over the Mediterranean, little ships with crews of youngsters recently joined; with these he tried to keep in being the blockade of the Black Sea Coast and to transport munitions and supplies for the "White" armies penned in the northern Caucasus.

One by one the ships reached France, to find the worth of words of honour: the movement took a new form. Mutinies broke out at Toulon, at other great naval ports, against the despatch of ships to the Russian coast and for the liberation of the mutineers imprisoned. The crews demanded that the war in Russia should be ended; they demanded immediate demobilization. Their programme was more political than it was in the Black Sea; what had been a "strike" of the crews became a "political strike". A committee of sailors at Toulon tried to become a revolutionary committee, a Soviet, by calling on soldiers and dockers to send their delegates to its meetings. Cavalry had to be used to prevent the men storming the prison where most of the mutineers' "ringleaders" were waiting trial. The movement was broken by patience, the use of careful but solid force, the counter-attraction of leave, the arguments of Socialist and trade union leaders—and by demobilization. Not until demobilization—which the government did not desire but had to decree—was well advanced, in September, dared the authorities

bring to trial the majority of the men of the Black Sea; one, however, had already been tried, far away, at Constantinople—André Marty.

Engineer, then by hard work and capacity, engineer officer,¹ he had a background of socialism and anarchism. His father had fought for the Paris Commune, and been ten years in exile. He despised the socialist leaders; hated the gentlemen officers who patronized him; and outside Odessa, when the first French troops landed there and the ships swung their guns to cover the town, he decided to flood the ammunition hoists and fuse the lights, "inexplicably", on his destroyer the *Protet*, rather than help in the attack on a revolution to which he felt bound heart and soul.

There was no firing; he did not have to carry out his resolution. The *Protet* bucked its way through the short brutal swells of the Black Sea on staff errands, several times coming back to the Rumanian port, Galatz. There Marty decided to ask members of the crew, secretly, if they would join him when next his destroyer put to sea, seize the ship, and take it to Odessa, where in consultation with the Bolsheviks the crew would see what could be done to force the return of the whole fleet to France.

Men agreed, a little committee was formed. But no less than three of the committee were spies! Marty had been rash, open, even violent in standing

¹ "Mechanical engineer of the second class, I was assimilated to the officers of the bridge."—Marty.

up for his political opinions in the messroom, and before ordinary seamen and his stokers. It is dangerous to talk militant socialism in an officers' mess; much more dangerous to be heard talking it among the crew. He had used a big red flag for an emergency signalling device that had to be rigged up, until officers ashore protested. When the admiral spoke to the crew on the necessity for shooting Bolsheviks he had warned the destroyer's captain: "Keep out of that business, it might not go so well." Members of the crew had heard that too. Marty was marked.

One of the spies, a careful fellow, Durand, kept a little notebook in which he put down every word Marty spoke. Durand had his hour of glory at the court martial, but the Navy became uncomfortable for him after that. In the dark he was apt to undergo unpleasant accidents, and could never discover which individuals of the crew he lived with knew the origin of these accidents; but he could tell from the attitude of the whole crew why they happened. He was demobilized and while working in Paris in 1922 was killed—electrocuted—by accident.

Marty's ship was despatch boat and staff runabout for the general commanding the Black Sea area, and was continually at sea. He had got in touch with Socialists at Galatz in Rumania, but never received a single leaflet or pamphlet. He was never long at Odessa or any other port where the Bolsheviks had a printing press, legal or illegal. He

knew nothing therefore of the army's feelings, save what soldiers were saying in Galatz, and nothing of the feelings of the crews of the big ships. He knew nothing of the mutinies in the French army, news of which was being spread in the illegal leaflets. But he was just on the point of trying to seize the ship when he was arrested. Badina, his most reliable ally, was also arrested, but later escaped.

Marty, put in prison ashore, was for two days the victim of desperate anxiety: he did not know for certain who had betrayed him, who had been arrested; he not know whether he had succeeded in warning the Rumanian socialists with whom he had been in contact; immediately he was arrested and shut up in his own cabin, this warning and the destruction of correspondence had been his first thoughts. In his barracks prison there was a sentinel outside the door, and one outside the window—men of the 4th Colonial Infantry. He had only been shut up for ten minutes when the door was opened and in came a dozen soldiers; they wanted to know what it was all about. And while they listened to Marty's story, the sentinel kept watch outside to warn them if an officer came near. "Just when I thought I was isolated," writes Marty, "those who were told to guard me fraternized with me. Hope of success shone out for me again."

From that time onwards he was seldom without contact with mutinous or ready-for-mutiny soldiers and sailors. His guard was changed; black troops

were given the job, who took it seriously (six men and a corporal accompanying him, with fixed bayonets, to the lavatory); but there were always some of his friends getting messages through to him or running about the town with his scribbled notes.

He could have escaped, probably, at various times. He refused to attempt it: "Why should I? These men round me are ready for a struggle—and am I to desert?"

News of a revolt in the fleet, far away in Sevastopol, soaked through to him from the wireless station at staff headquarters on the Easter Sunday, the very day the revolt began; and he thought it might be useful to prevent his destroyer the *Protet* from sailing. Instructions on how to do this—"a complete manual of sabotage"—the court martial called them—were sent to one Bredillard, but Bredillard had been frightened by the arrests and at once handed them over to the officers. Some members of the crew, indignant at this—"he might have said nothing and done nothing, if he was scared"—and indignant also that Bredillard helped in a hunt to find the soldier who had brought the message, at once arranged to denounce Bredillard for undisclosed knowledge of the "plot" to seize the ship, in which he had in fact taken no part. They were believed, and poor Bredillard, instead of getting promotion for revealing the "second plot", went to prison for four months for not revealing the first!

The military authorities found their men were

too interested in this unusual thing, an officer of the Navy in their barracks jail. So Marty was transferred back to the *Protet*, where he overheard a discussion outside his door on "why not put a bullet in his head and say he was trying to escape?" He protested to the captain, without obvious result; he found later that the commander of the flotilla to which the *Protet* belonged had said after hearing of Marty's arrest that "if there's an officer on the *Protet* who is aware of his duty, he will know what to do". The conversations, however, got no further than an attempt by one officer after another to persuade someone else to do the job; perhaps Marty saved himself by making his protest to the captain so loudly that members of the crew could hear.

The *Protet* came to Odessa, and there Marty was transferred to the *Waldeck-Rousseau*, flagship of the cruiser squadron. It was April 23rd, four days after the mutiny had begun down the coast at Sevastopol, and the day on which the *France* weighed for home. Marty had seen a few of the cruiser's men, as he was being taken down to the cells; he thought they looked very young—"no help to be expected from them." For a long day he was shut up, feeling depressed at the irony: to be so near Odessa, his goal, and to be there only for a court martial, perhaps an execution. The sentry outside the cells was changed during the evening. Some minutes later the door was opened a little: "Comrade, I've volunteered to guard you. Don't be afraid; we have a revolutionary

group on board. Here's pencil and paper: write why you are here, and what's happening." Marty was so overcome he could not at first sit down to write. Then came the thought "a *provocateur*?" Impossible, the sentry was a tall lad with a clear brow; his eyes looked straight into mine. . . . That's no proof. . . . So the debate went on in Marty's mind, while he settled down to write. *And now we must win this flagship for the red flag. . . .*

His scrawled appeal contained a few lines on the Russian revolution, a few on the "plot" on the *Protet*; there followed the claim that the war on Russia was illegal, according to the constitution of the French Republic, and that every citizen had the right of insurrection against a breach of the constitution; it ended "workers ought not to kill workers. Your only enemies are the officers!"

These were bolder words than had yet been spoken by any leader of the mutiny, and Marty added to them the advice: get in touch with the "left" socialist deputies (members of Parliament) in France; form a "secret committee" on board to lead propaganda and action.

Here were two things that Marty himself, rash and hasty on his little destroyer, had forgotten or failed to do. Thinking it over in the cells, he had realized that his failure was due to the impossibility of carrying out a "job" such as he had contemplated until discussions, arguments, propaganda had brought the great majority of the crew to agree-

ment, and had shown up the few who were seeking advancement as spies for the officers. He had realized his isolation, and at the same time the amount of support available round him, the stirring everywhere towards action.

While he wrote and wrote, the sentry warned him: "How's it going? Only an hour left of my turn of duty. . . ." Then the half hour, then the quarter. Five minutes before the change of guard Marty handed over his letter; they shook hands.

Before he slept a hand tapped at his port-hole: he opened: tobacco, cigarette paper and matches were thrust in; a voice murmured quickly: "Take these from me, Lafleur, an engineer, jailed for propaganda. Be careful of your neighbour, who is there to spy on you. We'll have them yet!" A hand groped for the handshake and disappeared. The man had climbed through his own port-hole and clambered along the side of the ship, risky work for a few words. Marty went to sleep that night "happy for the first time for a week".

The crew of the *Waldeck-Rousseau* were in fact almost all youngsters of the 1918 class, those called up only a few months before the ship left Toulon. All had received long leave before sailing. It was hoped that this was a "safe" crew; but in fact the mutiny on this cruiser was, according to the statement of the Minister for the Navy (13th June, 1919), the most serious of all. These young men had not left France until March 1919, they brought with

them the fever of the Socialist feeling then rising in the French working class which on May 1st, 1919 led to a general strike in Paris and won the eight-hour day in many industries. They knew something, though it was uncertain and contradictory, about the Russian revolution. Left-wing Socialist papers—one, the *Vague*, sold between 200,000 and 300,000 copies—had reached the cruiser every day. And, by one of those accidents that history knows to be difficult to accept as accidents, the cruiser had aboard it a “secret society” grouping a hundred men or so. Nothing could be more respectable than the origin of this society: it was formed by sailors from Languedoc to hold a grand banquet after demobilization, and to celebrate this occasion in future years. It had the title, however, of “The Fraternal Union of Workers”: membership cards were printed (with the name of the restaurant where the banquet was to take place); and the unlucky vice-president’s name was also on these cards; the president had left the ship. The vice-president, a cook’s mate, got double sentence, compared with his colleagues, when the court martial sat. And there may be something in the prosecution’s claim that the “Fraternal Union” was in fact a rallying ground for the “conspirators”, though the cook’s mate only appears in the story when he restrained the crew from savaging Vice-Admiral Caubet, who was refusing to let the ship go back to France. “For pity’s sake, quiet!” he cried, “you’ve got here not

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an admiral but an old man; respect him." This appeal succeeded.

The mutiny went the same way as in the *France*, with some exceptions. The "revolutionary committee" pressed, on Marty's suggestion, for the ship to be taken the few hundred yards into the harbour of Odessa, and "put at the service of the revolution". If Marty had been there, among them, the crew might have agreed, but these nineteen-year-olds had no leader even of Vuillemin's quality. So when the ship sailed the mutiny died down—to break out again soon after she was moored at another Black Sea port, the officers hoping that the mutiny was ended. This second outbreak led to some fine gestures; the vice-admiral, before the crew, drew a revolver and pointed it at his own head; an officer started a patriotic speech and then fainted. Preparations had been made by the admiral to blow up the ship, and armed officers guarded the munition-hoists; part of the ship was barricaded and held by officers with revolvers. By these methods the crew were "calmed". But the cruiser could not be kept in the Black Sea; there was mutiny at Constantinople, when the cruiser reached there, mutiny at Bizerta, fear of it at Toulon; the *Waldeck-Rousseau* had to be sent to a Syrian port to isolate it from other vessels.

Marty was not on board at the critical moment when the revolt broke out. The vice-admiral had been warned by a spy that revolt might occur, and

had hastily shipped him back to the *Protet*. His release had been the first demand of the crew on the bigger vessel; it would have added to the mutiny the qualities of revolutionary experience—Marty had “grown up” during the few days in prison—of audacity and leadership, the vigour of a powerful man in the prime of life, the prestige of an officer. And it is certain that Marty, even if he could not have taken the ship into Odessa, would at once have established contact with the Bolsheviki on shore.

Propaganda does not make a mutiny, but does help to bind into one stream the scattered forces of those who struggle without knowledge of each other. The Bolsheviki in Odessa, when the town was ruled by the French, or by Petlura their ally, or by “White Guards” supported by the French, had carried on a constant propaganda among the French troops. Many tracts were printed on brown wrapping paper, partly because of the shortage of paper, partly because these showed up well when scattered in the snow. The French staff had done all they could to check this dangerous appeal to friendship and for peace; desperate at last, their front crumbling, the town being pillaged by their own allies the “White” officers—who knew the end was near—they had shot all the known French-speaking Bolsheviki of Odessa, among them a Frenchwoman of forty, Jeanne Labourbe. Within ten days the Bolsheviki had established a new French-speaking group; and the murder of Jeanne Labourbe (and

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the rape of three young Russian girls "arrested" at the same house by five "White" officers—the girls were later shot) began to be known among the French troops. This "Edith Cavell of Odessa", as a French paper called her, defeated the French generals who had ordered or permitted her death—she and her companions had been taken straight from the French staff headquarters to the Jewish cemetery, considered a convenient spot for executions.

Propaganda does not change a mutiny into something bigger; but the release of Marty by the crew of the *Waldeck-Rousseau* might have given the mutiny leadership, contact with the shore, organization; the fleet might have gone back to France as one unit, able to prevent punishment and able to end the war. These "might have beens"! When a class, a social force, has not yet quite grown to the stature that will enable it to take control of events, its leaders are always in prison and it has little or no organization, no contact between its scattered parts. Lilburne in prison when the Levellers fight; Marty transferred to the *Protet* an hour before revolt breaks out on the ship he left—these are examples not of "might have beens" but of the way history works. In some cases, when a class is dying out, the chance never recurs; in other cases there may be a different end to the tale.

Marty was court martialled in Constantinople and sentenced to twenty years. He put up a fighting

defence, news of which reached France and helped to fan the struggle in Toulon and other ports that prevented for many months trial of the crews of the larger ships. But in the end, after the demobilization, the trials took place. The punishments included five sentences to death; one of these men died in prison, the others had their sentences commuted to twenty years each. The total was six hundred and thirty years of prison for twenty-eight soldiers and one hundred and two sailors.

This total is very considerable: it may be recalled that the period of the "anti-socialist laws" in Germany, under Bismarck had at one time been considered a high level in repression—Russia always excepted. In ten years, 1878 to 1888, Bismarck's government only handed out 1000 years of imprisonment. The pre-war world seems to us now far off!

Of this total of six hundred and thirty years not a third was served. The campaign for the release of the prisoners won continually widening support. The last groups of the sailors were freed in 1922; Marty himself, elected to the Paris Council at successive elections, was freed in July 1923. The author of this book met him, for a few minutes, while it was being written; a solid vigorous man with the unmistakable bearing of the sailor, one of the leaders of a party holding over seventy seats in the Chamber of Deputies, one of the leaders of the alliance of parties that seems now to control the

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future of France, the *Front Populaire*. He had spent a second, rather longer, part of his life in jail for organizing action against the French war in Morocco. It will not be easy for any French government to carry on aggressive war anywhere if Marty and his many supporters are out of jail.

CHAPTER NINE

ENGLAND IS DIFFERENT



ENGLAND is different: in this chapter we shall not tell of divisions and army corps refusing to go into battle, of warships sailing in charge of the crews' delegates, or of machine guns turned on mutineers. This difference is a fact: these things have not happened in recent British history, as they have in French, German and Russian. But this difference has a meaning; there are causes for it. There are those who believe that it derives from the character and qualities of British people, that the English are too sensible or too respectful for law and order to carry mutiny to its full development and that Divine Providence or the English weather or the traditions of our past make impossible among English people events similar to those of Kiel or the Black Sea or the Chemin des Dames. With those who believe this we can disagree, without hesitation. Past chapters of this book have shown that mutiny carried to the pitch of warfare is no alien to our English fields, that the navy, "which is us"—to use Mr. Ramsay Macdonald's

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phrase—can be moved by well-founded grievances to go as far as blockading London, and that English rulers can, as in India, develop a blind, half-mad ferocity of repression that makes Tsarist pogroms playful by comparison. The present chapter will, we believe, show that all the material and psychological factors for mutiny were present among Englishmen in the army in the recent past; the fact that the incipient mutinies never grew to full stature can be clearly shown, we believe, to be due only to the wealth, skill, and success of the English ruling class. Officers and those controlling them knew always how and when to give way, to grant the necessary concessions—and could afford to do so. Britain's hundred-year-old supremacy in industry and trade has built up a ruling class skilful enough and rich enough to buy off classes or sections of classes threatening it—even in financial crises such as that of 1931. But wisdom and wealth are both relative, and when the supply of either fails the English ruling class—as in Ireland on many occasions—uses the methods of terrorism, reprisals, repression; and as always these methods goad men who believe they have a justified cause or grievance into revolt. The English ruling class included before the war, a section bold enough to use mutiny for its own political ends. A Liberal Government passed a Home Rule Bill for Ireland; Conservative Ulster armed to resist it, with weapons purchased abroad. The officers of the navy allowed rifles from Ger-

many to come in, without actively and openly disobeying the Government's orders. There was no mutiny of these naval officers: they merely obstructed the Government they were supposed to be serving. Certain officers in the army pressed obstruction further. They "went on strike".

They believed that the Government was contemplating that Ulster should be "coerced"—that the ordinary law of the land in regard to the arming and drilling of a private army should be enforced. Cavalry units near the borders of Ulster thought that they might be moved into the disaffected counties: officers serving under Sir Hubert Gough at Curragh camp, County Kildare, "sent in their papers" acting together, when they thought this move was imminent. "To send in papers" is to resign; a private or a sergeant cannot resign from the British Army, but an officer can. He is therefore in the same position as a workman was before a host of modern regulations and the pressure of unemployment tied workmen to their jobs: he can throw up his work at will. (This privilege is not possessed by officers in most European countries.) But just as concerted "resignations" by many workmen, made conditional on some concessions from the workmen's employers, are strikes, are a different thing from individual "resignations", so this action by a large group of officers was in effect a military strike. Troops cannot be used, and any value they have for the enforcement of

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law is destroyed, if their officers resign in a body.

The Liberal Government, unwilling to master Ulster lawlessness—the rebels were part of the ruling class, and “coercion” was therefore impossible—persuaded the officers at the Curragh camp to withdraw their resignations. The “incident” was soon over, and is now almost forgotten; but it is part of our past that should not go into oblivion.

It has been suggested that England is different from other countries in this matter of mutinies because of qualities of kindness and friendliness governing the Englishman in uniform. These qualities exist, but they have nothing to do with mutiny or the absence of it. And these qualities exist in spite of, against the declared desire of, those who control the army; they are qualities evident between man and man, but not so often evident between man and officer. “Blood lust” is the aim of the training given to infantry—a degradation of ordinary humane men into callous fighters. Brigadier-General Crozier describes the training of his battalion in 1915:

I, for my part, do what I can to alter completely the outlook, bearing, and mentality of over a thousand men . . . blood lust is taught for purposes of war in bayonet fighting itself and by doping the minds of all with propagandic poison. The German atrocities (many of which I doubt in secret), the employment of gas in action, the violation of French women and the “official murder” of Nurse Cavell all help to bring out the brute-like bestiality which is so necessary for victory. The process of

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"seeing red", which has to be carefully cultured if the effect is to be lasting, is elaborately grafted into the makeup of even the meek and mild. . . . The Christian churches are the finest blood lust creators which we have and of them we make free use. . . .

The British soldier is a kindly fellow. . . . It is necessary to corrode his mentality. . . ."¹

That is a frank confession of work that is done in creating an army: the army's actions cannot easily be attributed to innate kindliness when so much trouble has been taken to destroy that feeling.

On July 1st, 1916, the flower of the new British Army went over the top on the Somme, obeying the orders of stupidity and flinging away lives with reckless and splendid courage. But towards noon on that ghastly day a new thing enters into British warfare; at various points in the line the officers have to become "battle police", heading off and driving forward, if necessary at revolver point, men who are lagging back—under the strain of heavier casualties than have ever before wasted a British force of considerable size—or are retiring. Crozier describes this day:

I hear a rumour about riflemen retiring on the left and go out to "stop the rot" . . . A strong rabble of tired, hungry and thirsty stragglers approach me from the east. . . . They are marched to the water reserve, given a drink and hunted back to fight. Another more formidable party cuts across to the south. They mean

¹ F. P. Crozier, D.S.O.: *A Brass Hat in No-Man's-Land*, London, 1930, p. 42.

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business. They are damned if they are going to stay, it's all up. A young sprinting subaltern heads them off. They push by him. He draws his revolver and threatens them. They take no notice. He fires. Down drops a British soldier at his feet. The effect is instantaneous. They turn back. . . ."¹

This tragic position recurred in almost all Haig's offensives: men were led into a shattering upheaval of barrage and machine-gun fire by officers who died with them; the survivors drifted back and were "hunted" again into action by other officers detailed to control the employment of reserves.

The result was a breach between men and officers for those who suffered with the men were dead; those who hunted the men forward usually lived. Gradually but steadily, the breach widened and would in time have turned to open and widespread mutiny. By 1918 boiling-point had been nearly reached: troops in hospital at Etaples broke out and chased away the military police who blocked their way to the town; in Arras Canadian troops held the town for two days against their officers and the military police, and only the fact that the cellars of Arras were full of good drink prevented them from carrying the mutiny further. The British Army reached in 1916 approximately its full fighting strength, but the number of men in it condemned for acts of indiscipline, refusal to obey orders, or mutiny, increased as follows:

¹ *A Brass Hat in No-Man's-Land*, p. 109.

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1916	60
1917	221
1918	676

A leader of an early mutiny in the Valdelievre workshops near Calais writes:

The men were mainly artisans and largely trade unionists enrolled in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

Dissatisfaction over food, hours, and pay had of course been continuous from the earlier stages of the war. Messing committees focussed some of the discontent, but had little power. They occasionally came into conflict with the Commanding Officer.

The first real tussle, however, came some twelve months or more before the end of the war, and took the form of an attempted stay-in strike to shorten hours.

We were demanding that the working day should finish at 5 p.m. instead of 6 p.m. and as we failed to secure this by negotiation, a committee of the works decided that all men should leave at 5 p.m., ignoring the official hours. This failed as the response was only partial, and a staff sergeant, who had been most active in promoting this was moved and, we have reason to believe, victimized.

However, the hours were shortened by a half hour.

Nevertheless, discontent continued, and Government war propaganda lecturers have good reason to remember the towings they received at the Valdelievre Camp—one of the effects of reading Socialist publications which were smuggled into the camp and for which the present writer was responsible.

Here and there, in workshops or ordnance depots where the number of trade unionists was considerable, men in uniform organized "strikes" of some

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sort, tested out leaders and discovered methods of organization. But they were cut off by careful censorship from strikers and socialists at home; many of the opponents of war who could have given a little cohesion and direction to the movement had isolated themselves in prison by refusing to enter the army; and the German attacks on the western front, in the first half of 1918, made many waverers feel that the war must be continued until safety was assured. The small mutinies in the army before the Armistice therefore came to nothing, though small concessions were sometimes won. But the readiness of numbers of men to revolt was shown by the rapidity with which they acted as soon as fighting ended. The first mutiny of many was at Shoreham, on November 13th, 1918, two days after the Armistice. Its leader, G.P. of North Shields, writes:

I saw a major push a man up to his thighs in mud. . . . I was a sergeant and I marched the troops off the dock in spite of all the colonels and majors and lesser fry . . . and the guard of marines opened the gates to let us out. When I got them about half a mile from the huts, I halted them, and addressed them from the top of a bank and told them to stand firm, as the authorities would be giving them some soft soap as well as threats, which afterwards proved to be the case.

The next day the General came down from the Admiralty (we being under the discipline of the marines) and formed us up in three sides of a square, drove his motor car into the centre, read the Army Act out, and then invited any man to step out and go to work

who liked; I myself was made to fall out on the right by myself.

You can imagine my feelings, as being an old soldier of over twenty years service, of course, I knew the consequences of my act.

But I never saw such loyal men in my life, not one man moved. I could hear the sergeants in rear of the men telling them to stand by me, and it was well they did, or I should have got ten years or so.

The following Monday one thousand of us were demobbed, my name at the head of the list, and one thousand every week afterwards.

The wave of mutinies that began with Shoreham and reached its highest point at Folkestone and Calais has been attributed to delay and muddle over demobilization. Undoubtedly there was delay, and even more muddle than usual in the British Army. But these mutinies broke out too soon for the delay to have become unbearable, and showed many other causes: antagonism to officers, hatred of arbitrary discipline, revolt against bad conditions. The Folkestone mutiny which began on January 3rd, 1919, derived from these causes, and from the resentment of men ordered to go back to France after the war had ended. The men refused to parade at reveille. The *Herald* of January 11th, 1919, reports:

On their own signal—three taps of a drum—two thousand men, unarmed and in perfect order, demonstrated the fact that they were “fed up”—absolutely “fed up”. Their plan of action had been agreed upon

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the night before: no military boat should be allowed to leave Folkestone for France that day or any day until they were guaranteed their freedom.

It was sheer, flat, brazen, open and successful mutiny. . . .

Pickets were posted at the harbour. Only Canadian and Australian soldiers were to be allowed to sail—if they wanted to. As a matter of not very surprising fact, they didn't want to. One officer tried to interfere. He leaped across a gangway and got a rough house. "I am a relative of Sir Douglas Haig," one General officer pleaded. "We are all King's Messengers," said another party. But nothing of that kind availed them.

Meanwhile, troop trains were arriving at Folkestone with more men returning from leave and on the way to France. These were met by pickets . . . in a mass they joined the demonstrators.

On Saturday an armed guard of Fusiliers was posted at the quays by the army authorities. They carried fixed bayonets and ball cartridges. The pickets approached. One rifle made a show of going up; the foremost picket seized it, and forthwith the rest of the guard fell back. . . .

The mutineers visited the station in a body, after having posted their own harbour guards, and tore down a large label: "For Officers Only," which was posted above a comfortable waiting room. I mention this as it typifies one of the many causes of the trouble—the bitter resentment felt at the easy conditions of the officers as compared with those of the men. Another cause of trouble, about which I heard on every hand, was the poorness of the food.

On Saturday, a great procession of the soldiers concerned swelled by now to about 10,000, marched through the town. And everywhere the townspeople showed

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their sympathy. At midday a mass meeting decided to form a Soldiers' Union. They appointed their officials and chose their spokesmen.

Sir William Robertson came down from London and agreed to all the demands of the men. All with jobs open were at once demobilized (the men elected a hundred and forty demobilization clubs from the ranks to fill in the forms!) and men with prospects of a job were given a week's leave to make sure of work. A complete indemnity was promised to the mutineers. The generals promised they "would forget the incident".

"Everywhere the feeling is the same," wrote the *Herald* correspondent: "'The war is over, we won't fight in Russia, and we mean to go home.'"

News of the mutiny spread fast. At Dover 4000 soldiers demonstrated in support of Folkestone: the troopships would have been stopped next day if the Folkestone settlement had not been made. At Osterley Park on January 6th about 1500 men of the Army Service Corps seized lorries and drove into London to Whitehall; most of them were demobilized within four days. At Shoreham 7000 men demonstrated, at Shortlands 1500; 400 men entraining in London for Salonica (or South Russia) refused to get in the train; there were other mutinies within the week at Sydenham, Grove Park, Kempton Park, Park Royal, Aldershot, Maidstone, Chatham, Bristol and Fairlop. By the middle of the week delegates from Folkestone were in London demand-

ing that the concessions given them should be extended to cover other camps. The army was going home.

Meanwhile the troops in France were also moving. Five boys at Etaples had been court martialled on September 22nd, 1918, and sentenced to ten years imprisonment for acts of indiscipline; these were lads of seventeen and a half to nineteen and a half years of age; a continual stir of agitation was kept up for their release. Men at Calais insisted on getting supplies of the *Herald*, and first elected their delegates as distributors of this socialist weekly in each hut. Four hundred copies were sold in the largest camp near Calais, and two hundred and fifty in the Valdelievre works. An agitation for demobilization was begun, and one of the ring-leaders was arrested for "malingering" another given fourteen days field punishment for being a quarter of an hour late at work.

In Valdelievre camp where the first of these had been arrested writes a participant, "it was pay night but an angry crowd of men demonstrated outside the commanding officer's office demanding his release; all thoughts of pay were forgotten". The soldier's story continues:

The officers temporized, but we . . . smashed open the clink ourselves and released our comrade.

An attempt to re-arrest him was made about 10.30 but failed, as by prearranged signal we swarmed out like bees.

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Failing in this, imported military police then arrested the sergeant of the guard for failing to prevent the release of the prisoner.

Our blood was up now with a vengeance, and the sergeant was soon released and a thoroughly frightened C.O. promised to meet a committee and go into all grievances.

The next day, after a meeting with the committee, many concessions were made, including shorter hours. . . .

Towards the end of this week a hardening in the attitude of the officers was noticeable, but we quite expected that this would happen, and had made good use of our time in organizing the other camps in the area.

On the Sunday evening came the news that the same comrade had been again arrested whilst leaving an R.E. camp, where he had been organizing, and hurried to the "Bastille".

This was the spark that was required and a strike was immediately decided on to commence on the next day.

Although, as prearranged, every man was on the parade ground, not one fell in when the bugle sounded, and our pickets had already taken the place of the sentries.

During the morning news came that at another camp, Vendraux, 2,000 men were all out and were marching down that afternoon. They arrived headed by the regimental band and with all their N.C.O.'s participating. Both camps then joined in a march on the headquarters of the Calais area to interview Brigadier General Rawlinson.

Our bands were in attendance and the frightened French shopkeepers put up their shutters as 4,000 very

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determined men marched through the streets. The headquarters were surrounded and a deputation entered.

After a futile attempt to induce the besieging army to withdraw, the general agreed to release our comrade (who had been transferred elsewhere) and that he should be in camp by Tuesday midday.

The deputation resolutely refused to discuss any of our grievances or calling off the strike until our comrade had been released. On Tuesday morning parties of picked men were sent out to visit the different camps in the area, help them to put their strike organization in order and supply pickets if necessary (but it wasn't).

I was with one of these parties and visited several small camps and found them all solid. We then split into small groups and scoured the nooks and crannies of the dock area. I will quote two instances just to show the atmosphere.

Myself, a solitary party of one, I found a group of five or six N.C.O.'s doing some clerical work.

Myself: "What are you doing here? Don't you know there's a strike on?" N.C.O.'s swinging round on their office chairs—"sickly grin."

Myself: Question repeated with expletive and still no answer. "I've no time to waste arguing with you, come on now, out of it." Result: All troop out, myself bring up the rear.

Another comrade in our party, also on his own, found a camp that was not then out and the guard made an attempt to arrest him; the rest of the party had now reassembled when our comrade appeared in a somewhat dishevelled state:

"Come on, boys," he said, "the b——s have tried to arrest me!"

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Not more than half an hour later the men were out and the guard had been removed.

On returning to camp we found the same sort of reports coming in from all quarters and nearly every camp embracing all the departmental corps were out, comprising some 20,000 men.

Our comrade who had been arrested was brought over by car and put down about 100 yards from the camp where he was received with joyous acclamation.

But the strike went on and continued to extend.

Strike committees were functioning in all camps with headquarters in Valdelievre, where a special office was established from which daily orders were issued and obeyed.

Any work that was absolutely necessary was done under permit from the Strike Committee and we had one pass giving permission to several officers, N.C.O.'s and men to proceed to a football match. This was signed by two privates, members of the committee.

Then came General Byng. He arrived in a "posh" car which was immediately commandeered and replaced by a Ford, but his army did not arrive until Wednesday night, for he was obliged to resort to road transport as we had tied up the railways, the French Union agreed not to handle any British traffic.

Shortly before this the French railwaymen had had a short strike in which our Royal Engineers had agreed not to handle any French traffic, hence the reciprocation.

General Byng has stated that he only imported troops to deal with the malcontents at the leave camps. Why, then, was a detachment surreptitiously installed in the workshops at Valdelievre and also Vendraux?

Why were machine-gun units posted at different points of vantage where we would be obliged to pass in order to reach the food depots?

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The arrival of General Byng's army did not cause the collapse of the strike, although it did affect the morale of some members of the committee. However, the tactics of fraternizing with Byng's army were adopted, and with surprise we learnt that they themselves had been in dispute just previously, mainly over the question of demobilization.

An attempt had also been made to play on the prejudice of the line troops as against the departmental troops, and one of the officers regaled the men with stories of bloodshed, looting, and assaults on women, etc., for which he was subsequently forced by our president to apologize.

The real truth was that not one drop of blood was shed or a single case of personal violence recorded. This was due to the unanimity of the men, the thoroughness of the organization and its complete control of the area.

Both the railways and motor transport which were under our control declined to function except to carry foodstuffs to the troops or any particular service that the committee might desire.

On Thursday morning it was announced that the heads of the different departments concerned (thirteen in all) were ready to meet the representatives of the men and women, and thirteen representing our side were sent to the conference which opened about two o'clock in the afternoon.

Meanwhile an important discovery had been made by one comrade, who by a study of the "Army Manual" had found that a soldier released under mass pressure such as we had exercised could be re-arrested and tried on the original charge at any time. This discovery was communicated to the delegation and they decided to demand an immediate court martial.

The brass hats were then confronted with a demand

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for a court martial, to be held before any other business was discussed.

Their first reply was that this was impossible, but on being asked if there were not enough of them there to constitute a court martial, they gave way.

Our comrade was tried and acquitted, and the conference then proceeded, lasting the rest of the day and finishing at 10 p.m.

The greater part of our demands were conceded; others, including recognition of the men's association were to be forwarded to the War Office and a reply was demanded by midnight.

The compliance of the delegation to this demand was no doubt a mistake, and was the subject of much criticism on the part of the men afterwards.

The vote on the proposals was so rushed that it was only taken in one camp, Valdelievre, where only a few men, largely the weak-kneed variety were left.

The reason for this was that a large French cinema had thrown open its doors to our men for a special show of British pictures. This was an unusual attraction and it appealed to the men, who felt that they were in such a strong position that a night's enjoyment could well be afforded. Whether the brass hats had a hand in this I cannot say, but the results were doubtless received with sighs of relief.

The consternation of the men of Valdelievre Camp on returning about 11.30 p.m. and finding that a vote had been taken of the few men left in camp, resulting in a narrow majority for resumption of work, can well be imagined.

The language used was unprintable, but the damage was done, and naturally the other camps fell into line with Valdelievre, which had been recognized as the headquarters of the strike.

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Another factor which was also largely responsible for the disinclination on the part of the committee to continue to extend the struggle was the collapse of the expected general strike which had begun on the Clyde on the same day as our own, and to which our eyes were anxiously turned.

What might have happened is mere conjecture, but it is indisputable and was recognized by the committee that a continuation and extension of the struggle (we already had contacts as far as the Rhine) inevitably meant that it would assume a revolutionary character which they were unwilling to face without likelihood of support at home.

To return to our story, although work was resumed on the following day, the military authorities felt very far from secure and made no attempt to suppress our organization.

The military police now reappeared, but had instructions not to interfere with us in any way, all the ordinary regulations were dead letters—for instance, one could return to camp at midnight, or later, enter cafés, etc. during prohibited hours, without any fear of disciplinary action being taken.

The committee was now established on a regularized basis and met in secluded rooms in cafés with sentries posted outside. The basis of representation was two delegates each for the smaller units, larger ones like Valdelievre sending four or more delegates. The name adopted was "The Calais Area Soldiers and Sailors' Association." The average attendance of a meeting of the committee was from twenty to thirty, which shows that although the strike was over we did not feel or act as defeated men, indeed the spirit was still unimpaired.

One of the first meetings of the association decided to ask for representation on the newly formed "Soldiers,

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Sailors and Airmen's Union". A comrade about to be demobilized was chosen and given his credentials and accepted on his arrival as our representative on the executive of that body.

We now come to the last part of the story, i.e., the returned leave men, who, according to General Byng were engaged in a real mutiny. We never really knew what happened to those men after the strike.

These troops, we understood, insisted that they should all be demobilized immediately, but this was not supported by the main committee and I believe the strike was continued by the leave men, and we heard that one or two men had been victimized.

Now, one of the conditions of the settlement had been no victimization, therefore, when this information reached the association they immediately approached the military authorities in order to secure that the terms of settlement be carried out. However, they denied it and offered us facilities to search the records.

I myself was at this time secretary of the association, and it fell to my lot and that of the president to make the search, we being granted leave from work to do so, but we could find no trace of any court martial of any men in respect of the strike.

The military authorities had had their lesson and about three weeks after the strike commenced demobilization in real earnest and (I will let them into a secret now) only just in time to avert another very drastic form of direct action.

The method adopted was to demobilize first all those who were known to be the biggest rebels, and by this method they gradually reasserted their authority with greater severity than before.

Thus ended what we have reason to believe was the most complete and best organized revolt in the modern

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history of the British Army; the keynote was "an injury to one is an injury to all" and it proved the fallacy of the idea that the military machine must always remain the tool of the Brass Hats.

However, although the most effective, it was not the only rebellion that occurred and perhaps later we may learn the real facts of others that occurred at Boulogne, Etaples and other places.

The comrade whose arrest was the spark that started the strike died in hospital with pneumonia and complications as the result of exposure whilst under arrest. He was placed in a damp cell, handcuffed and with leg-irons on.

A few words may be added from the accounts written by other participants. One says: "It was funny for us to be signing chits for officers to leave camp, but that was the rule we made."

Another, Mr. B. G. A. Cannell who was working, at the time of the Armistice, as a clerk at "the big Ordnance Depot at a place called Vendroux" considered the "camp and the food deplorable"; he even envied the conditions of Chinese labourers and German prisoners nearby.¹

After the Armistice [he writes] things began to get very unsettled. We heard that two men had been arrested for sedition, and were at Boulogne, and might be shot in the Tower.

A strike committee was hastily formed, and every soldier in the district marched down to Calais on January 27th, 1919.

¹ *From Monk to Busman*, by B. G. A. Cannell, with a Foreword by the Bishop of London. Skeffington, London, 1935.

Mr. Cannell denies that these men were armed, contradicting Winston Churchill on this point. "The thought of using guns never entered our heads . . . the majority of our men had been up the line. There were plenty of new guns in the Ordnance Depot, and millions of rounds of ammunition, but we had seen enough of that nonsense to last us a lifetime."

Mr. Cannell also denies that the men were "striking" in order to be demobilized. "No such thing, we wanted the men released, and had trains waiting to go and fetch them."

Two divisions of troops were brought up to overawe the strikers. They made no impression, for as Mr. Cannell says: "They all looked like 'bits of boys' who were sent out just as the war ended."

The men took over the running and feeding of the camp. The fact that there was plenty of food for everybody confirmed them in the belief that someone had previously been "making a good thing out of the troops". Mr. Cannell's version is: "our food was being 'flogged' (sold) to the French people. In fact, I saw with my own eyes, clothes baskets full of bully, cheese and bacon going out of the camps at night."

After the "strike" had been going on for several days, a conference was held in Calais with General Byng in the chair. He had a pile of grievances put before him, and promised redress if the men would go back to work. Mr. Cannell believes "our little

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'bust-up' did a lot of good. New huts were gradually put up, and the food was much better, and we did not work Saturday afternoons or Sundays. . . . We were highly delighted when the two men we knew who had been arrested were released, and turned up on our parade-ground.

"They said they had been treated very badly in prison. One died soon after he came out. Some said through his ill-treatment. . . . But the boys were very good, we raised several hundred francs for his widow."

The sum raised was in fact nearly £150.

Lord Byng has since stated that four of the ring-leaders among the leave men were arrested and imprisoned. Perhaps there was some faking of the records inspected at the office of the Calais commandant.

At Dunkirk, about the same time as the men at Calais mutinied, the 178th Brigade "prepared to strike"; they were promised immediate demobilization.

Demobilization was in fact the weapon with which the authorities ended the mutinies wherever they occurred. It had to be pushed through so completely and so rapidly that by the middle of 1919—according to Sir Henry Wilson's memoirs—the War Office was unable to scrape up even a few battalions for work that the Cabinet wanted done.

By demobilization the strikes in France during January 1919 were ended; but at once the same

process began in England. Men of the Army Service Corps struck at Battersea, Camberwell and Kemp-ton Park; in the latter place men repairing lorries (later to be sold for civilian use) demanded trade union rates of pay for this work. There was a demonstration in Whitehall of a thousand men; they were surrounded by Guards and cavalry and surrendered. This—a direct threat to the centre of Government—was the only mutiny resisted by the ruling class in such a way that fighting might easily have occurred.

Of the navy we know less than of the army, for 1918 and 1919. An admiralty agent, Lionel Yexley, has written of preparations for mutiny made in Portsmouth in the summer of 1918; he was able to wake the Admiralty to the seriousness of these preparations and steps were at once taken to prevent the threatened "general strike" occurring. Pay and conditions were at once improved, a "lower deck" organization of a sort was promised to meet the men's demand for a trade union—a demand stimulated by a police strike in London and other towns—and a petty officer, condemned to long imprisonment for insubordination, was released. The crews stationed then at Portsmouth were scattered to other stations. By these means the movement was averted.

Soon after the armistice a struggle began, to end the war on Russia: at Libau on the Baltic the crew of a light cruiser mutinied, and ships had to be sent home owing to "troubles" from Archangel

and Murmansk. Refusals to weigh for Russia occurred at Invergordon, Portsmouth, Rosyth, Devonport, and Fort Edgar.

At Rosyth a large cruiser was refitting before sailing to Russia; news of the destination of the ship leaked out and dockers supplied pamphlets from the Socialist Labour Party. The crew refused to sail, and for three weeks held on, though isolated in mid-stream from the shore and from other vessels. The cruiser had to be sent in the end to Portsmouth and the crew paid off.

The Admiralty complained in 1925 that "Bolshevism" was being spread in the navy, and between the mutinies of 1919 and that of Invergordon there were six minor movements, always against conditions of work and the arbitrary injustices of naval disciplines, on the *Revenge*, *Royal Oak*, *Vindictive*, *Repulse*, *Ramillies* and *Lucia*. Forty-two men were arrested in the case of the *Lucia*, which arose because men had to paint ship at a week-end when they had expected leave.

Invergordon stands by itself, a political event of the first magnitude that helped to shake the Bank of England as well as to force the National Government to revise its policy of economy. It was partly because of the foreign reaction to news of mutiny throughout the Home Fleet that the pound sterling was driven off the gold standard. The story can best be told by one of the leaders of the mutiny,¹

¹ Len Wincott. *Invergordon*. International Labour Defence.

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On the night of Saturday, 12th September, 1931, Sir Austen Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons that a reduction of 1s. per day would be made in the pay of all ratings below the rank of warrant officer. This was a foul blow to we junior ratings whose pay was 4s. and was being cut as much as that of a chief petty officer, some of whom were receiving as much as 12s. and 15s. per day. The men realized that "cuts" had been prepared for some time, and that the "financial crisis" was only an excuse for putting them into force. Pensions also came under the hammer and as many of us would not be receiving them for several years, no one could expect us to believe that the reductions would assist a financial crisis of to-day.

We could not stand the cuts. We were already on the bare minimum required to enable us to support our families. The thought that our wives and children would be compelled to suffer, along with the thought of the trick that had been played on unrepresented and unprotected men, made us bitterly resent this cruel treatment. Our families would not be able to exist. Our children would starve and our wives might be driven to prostitution. This was the real meaning of the cuts to us.

On Sunday night, every available man of the watch on shore mustered in the canteens and discussed the situation to find a possible way out. As the men were congregating, A.B. Bond, of the H.M.S. *Rodney* stood on a table and made a speech. He called upon the men to resist the cuts, and pointed out that the only way it could be done was by strike action. His speech gained the sympathy of all in the canteen, and was followed by myself. I called upon the men to unite as a body and strike, for the lives of our wives and kiddies were at stake. I pointed out how millions of pounds were

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wasted every year in the navy for unnecessary exercises, officers' extras, upkeep of admirals' yachts, entertainments for foreign notabilities, unlimited number of servants for captains and admirals, officers' cars being repaired on board ship, Government stores being used for officers' personal property, along with other methods. I appealed to the ratings not to allow their pay to stand the brunt of this.

I then called for one volunteer from each ship to act as a representative on each, to try and find out the general feeling, and to spread the news of a further meeting to be held on the following night, which would make a definite decision as to the action which would be taken. The response to the appeal was wonderful, and there was considerable difficulty to select the best man out of the many good ones who volunteered. However, the right men were selected and the meeting that night dispersed.

On Monday night we again gathered in the canteen, and held a further protest meeting. The selected men were giving their reports, when a patrol commanded by an officer entered the canteen and demanded that the speeches should cease. The men paid no heed to him. A glass was thrown at the officer and the canteen was cleared. The meeting then repaired to Black Park, a football ground in the rear of the canteen. Here speeches were made and the men, by a unanimous show of hands, decided that they would commence the strike on Tuesday morning. The men then returned to their ships singing the "Red Flag", and when they got back they were shouting from ship to ship: "Don't forget to-morrow morning."

On Tuesday morning at six a.m. the men on the *Rodney* struck. Their cheers could be heard by all the other ships. By eight a.m. all the ships' companies were

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on strike. The usual actions taken by the officers were out of the question, we having complete command of everything.

By various methods the captains of the ships tried to get us to turn to. Speeches on traditions and the prestige of the British Navy were made. Veiled reference was made to previous disturbances, and the ultimate punishment meted out to the ringleaders. But we were adamant. So much was at stake that we firmly refused to go to work. Attempts were then made by the officers to take down particulars of possible hardship incurred by the cuts. We refused this. It seemed as if it were a manoeuvre by the officers to segregate us and try to find the leaders of the strike. The officers then asked us what our demands were. We then told the officers to clear off and that we would prepare them.

A hurried meeting was held in the fo'castle of the H.M.S. *Norfolk*. I drafted a manifesto which was read out to the men. They agreed to it. Copies of the Manifesto were then distributed around the ships of the fleet, by giving them to the ratings on the motor boat who were plying between the different ships (this will be the first time the Admiralty will know how it was done).

"We, the loyal subjects of His Majesty the King, do hereby present to our Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty our earnest representations to them to revise the drastic cuts in pay that have been inflicted upon the lowest men on the lower deck. It is evident to all concerned that these cuts are the forerunner of tragedy, poverty and immorality amongst the families of the men on the lower deck. The men are quite willing to accept a cut which they, the men, think within reason and unless this is done we must remain as one unit refusing to serve under the new rates of pay."

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Copies of this manifesto were published in the newspapers, and read out in the House of Commons.

The ships were under our complete control. We carried out all the essential duties, such as food supply, lighting supply, cleaning of living quarters, provision of safety men and fire parties at night time. The services of the officers were not required and they were completely ignored and shunned by us. All leave was stopped, and all communications between the different ships cut off. However, we easily overcame this difficulty through the manner mentioned above. On Wednesday morning, the 16th, we gathered on the forecastle and gave three cheers to inform the other ships that we were still out. At nine a.m. the Admiral of the Second Cruiser Squadron visited the ships of his squadron. His own ship, the *Dorsetshire* had turned to, and he asked the men of the *Norfolk* and the *Adventurer* to follow suit. He made a provocative speech and called the men "Bloody Fools" and "Bloody Hooligans" but his attempt failed miserably. The efforts of all the officers were fruitless, and urgent communications were sent by them to the Admiralty.

On Wednesday evening a message was received from the Admiralty which was read to us. The signal was that all ships of the Atlantic Fleet must proceed to the home ports. Any further refusals of duty would be dealt with under the disciplinary acts. The Admiralty pointed out that they would set up a Commission to make enquiries into the pay question. The same night, in the House of Commons, Austen Chamberlain, First Lord of the Admiralty, stated that there would be no victimization of any individual connected with the strike at Invergordon.

We then turned to, and steamed the ships to their home ports. On arriving at the ports a Commission

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was instituted comprising the Commander-in-Chief of the Port, the Commodore of the Depot, and a civilian official from the Admiralty. We were asked to come forward and state our cases, and there were many hundreds of applicants. The Commission sat for two days and then a communication was issued from the Admiralty to the effect that the pay cuts had been revised on a percentage basis which would mean an A.B. would receive a 5d. cut instead of 1s.

Despite Sir Austen Chamberlain's promise of no victimization spies were going round trying to discover the names of we who led the strike. Special investigators were sent into all ports to spy on our movements and to find those of us who were termed the "ringleaders". After the commission was disbanded nothing further was said to us, and we made no further attempts to revive the agitation, or again to resist the cuts.

On the 15th October the ships received orders to sail to the Scottish ports on the 17th. On the afternoon of the 16th a certain number of us from each Devonport ship were given orders to leave and go into the Naval Barracks. Wincott was one of nine sent from H.M.S. *Norfolk*, and we were given a quarter of an hour to get off the ship, being continually threatened by an escort by a master-at-arms named Cayse. On arrival at the Barracks we discovered that there were men from the *Rodney*, *Dorsetshire* and *Adventurer*, who had been sent into the barracks in the same manner. In all we numbered thirty-six. We were led to believe that we had been sent in for disposal to ships on foreign stations, which is the usual procedure adopted by the Admiralty under such circumstances.

On the following Monday, we thirty-six were formed into three classes to undergo an introductory course. This "course" was merely a disguise to subject us to

severe punishment. We were compelled to drill with a rifle and bayonet continually at the double. We were run off our feet and allowed no time to rest, and we were subjected to rigorous punishment at the slightest provocation. We could see that behind all this were deliberate attempts to intimidate us but we carried out their orders to the letter.

On Tuesday morning we requested in the proper service manner to see the Commander-in-Chief of the Port to make a complaint. During the forenoon we were drilled under the same conditions out in the rain, and then later in the drill shed, but were not allowed to remove our oilskins. In the afternoon the Commodore of the Barracks addressed us. He said: "I understand that you have put in a request to see the Commander-in-Chief. That is contrary to rules and regulations, and you will have to see me first. I am quite willing to see any man who thinks he has a complaint. If I cannot give him satisfaction, he will be able to forward his complaint in writing to the Commander-in-Chief. *You are not being punished for the Invergordon affair. We all know that it was announced that there will be no victimization of individuals,* but the authorities know that there have been further activities both on board and ashore and you are suspected of having taken part in them. I am a man of intelligence and I shall take what steps I think fit to prevent you people from doing further damage. Mind you, I am not afraid of you, but I am afraid that you will contaminate the minds of some ignorant young urchins who know nothing, and I shall have the painful duty of punishing them."

The Commodore had given the game away. We know of no offences committed after Invergordon. But if the authorities said there had been, why were we not tried by the disciplinary acts signalled by the Admiralty, on

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the Wednesday that the strike ended? We had been given no trial. We had not been allowed to state our case.

On the Wednesday morning we saw the Commodore and stated our complaints. These complaints were:

1. Being subjected to an introductory course which was rigorous enough to constitute punishment.

2. Having been falsely accused by Commodore Lawrence at the Royal Naval Barracks of having taken part in activities both on board and ashore since the arrival of the ships at Devonport.

He was unable to satisfy us and agreed to forward our complaints in writing to the Commander-in-Chief. On Wednesday afternoon we received our first rest from the rigorous punishment to which we had been subjected since Monday morning. This course was carried on to the end of the week when the thirty-six were turned over to the ordinary depot routine.

During the next week, under the personal supervision of an officer, we were allowed to write out our complaints to the Commander-in-Chief. When they were completed we signed them and handed them to this officer.

No regard was taken of our complaints and we heard nothing further about them.

During the afternoon of the 3rd of November we were sent for separately and brought before the Commander of the Barracks. He had a form in his hand and from it he read:

"The Admiralty have approved of your discharge to shore. *Services no longer required.* You are eligible for unemployment benefit." No reason was given for this action and we were not allowed to ask any questions. Then we were rushed around under the personal supervision of a petty officer to the various discharge

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offices. Finally, twenty-four of us were given a free railway warrant to our homes and 13s. to buy civilian clothes. Then we were marched out of the gates and out of the navy to starve. Action had been delayed until our shipmates had sailed for Scottish waters, and they knew nothing of the treatment meted out to us. The reason for our dismissal was a mystery to us until we read in the daily papers the following morning, the official lie: *Dismissed for further subversive conduct.*

The persecution of the leaders of the strike has not killed the spirit amongst the men. We twenty-four were not the cause of the discontent, neither were we responsible for the calling of the strike. The cause lies much deeper than that.

We struck against grievances, against oppression, against cuts in our pay. These were the causes of the discontent.

But we did not call the strike. The British Government did that by attempting to force their unjustifiable cuts. It is they who should be in the dock charged with "Incitement to Mutiny".

There is no doubt that Invergordon was a victory for the mutineers, and considerable controversy has since developed as to whether the Board of Admiralty were to blame or the officers in charge on the spot. The solidity of the strike, and the aspects of it reminiscent of the struggle at Spithead in 1797, show that the men of the navy are quite capable of organizing and carrying through an effective mutiny. England is different—but in this case the difference is that the modern world has nowhere else seen a large section of a world

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dominating navy mutinying successfully and almost without possibility of resistance, before—perhaps long before—any upheaval among the civilian population that could help to precipitate such events, and without any sign that the mutiny had been fostered or even suggested by people outside the navy. From this point of view Invergordon was a complete refutation of those who believe or claim that events in foreign armies or navies could not have their counterparts in ours.

CHAPTER TEN

ANATOMY OF MUTINY



WE have already defined mutiny as the revolt of men under discipline of life and death. Men who mutiny may legally be killed for their refusal to obey orders. We have described many mutinies and tried to describe their causes. All that remains now is to draw these histories together in a net of generalization and to link the disparate causes under a single heading, mutiny's cause.

Mutinies are battles in the struggle between classes, a struggle that runs through all the events of history; the cause underlying all mutinies is the refusal of subject classes to remain in subjection, to accept the limits allotted to them. This generalization does not advance greatly our knowledge of the events and of the reasons for them, for "the class struggle" is a phrase of which the meaning is wide and still, by some, disputed; but this generalization—like any other definition—is valuable as a starting-point for inquiry and argument. A French writer,¹ for

¹ Charles Vidil: *Les Mutineries de la Marine Allemande*, introduction and *étude psychologique*.

example, who has made the only serious historical analysis of mutiny known to us, suggests that mutinies should be divided into two categories: one in which there is coincident political upheaval, a revolution approaching or in being; another in which the mutiny occurs without such stimulus, from forces and causes embodied in the army or navy itself. This distinction has a limited value in analysing each mutiny that occurs. Those begun during political upheaval often have characteristics that distinguish them from mutinies occurring in times of civil peace, but they are not necessarily similar characteristics: the mutinies of the Levellers against Cromwell, during the English revolution nearly three centuries ago, were very different in cause and course and outcome from the mutinies of peasant soldiers against Kerensky during the Russian revolution less than twenty years ago. In both cases the battalions that refused obedience were drawn from the same social types, the small agricultural producers, "the plough in the hands of the owner", but in the latter case the yeomen or peasants were allied with and led by a class that did not exist in Cromwell's day, the industrial working class, the city wage-workers. It would seem ludicrous if M. Vidil or those who follow him should lump together the mutinies of the Levellers and those that were part of the Bolshevik revolution just because each happened at times of social upheaval; an analysis of class strength and class antagonisms is

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necessary to explain the peculiar development of each movement.

To different types of men the mutinies in which they take part seem to have different reasons. The man with a strongly developed sense of social justice finds the reason for mutiny in the blind barbarities of military discipline—there have seldom been armies or navies in the world in which the officers did not often “make an example” of men for relatively trivial faults. The man with a developed sense of personal liberty gets the overwhelming feeling, at some point in his service, that he is caught in a great machine, a creaking inescapable convict treadmill, wasteful, deadening, loathed. Other men’s key grievances turn on food, overwork, pay or politics, and a dozen other factors may enter into the feelings of a battalion or a crew. But these feelings and resentments when they reach the pitch of action amount always to a refusal to be, any longer on one issue or on many issues, members of a subservient class: on the point in dispute or on wider questions (such as peace or war) the rank and file refuse to await their commander’s decisions any longer; they will decide for themselves. It is this decision, and not the depth of resentment or the particular things resented, that makes a mutiny.

It is remarkable in how many cases the decisive question in a mutiny is that of the release from arrest or imprisonment of some leader of insubordination. Over and over again in this book we have told of

protest, an arrest, and then the real mutiny with first among its aims the release of the men arrested. The men who mutiny may have different views, different grievances, different attitudes towards their officers but the arrest brings out the solidarity of the class that they belong to, stresses in them the feeling: "He is one of us." This happens even when the leader is in fact not of the same class as the men mutinying.

A war, besides sharpening all political questions with the sense of desperate urgency, sometimes makes a real physical differentiation among the officers which weakens their resistance to mutiny. When casualties among officers are heavy, two types survive: the relatively "weak", humane men who are not made for soldiering, are usually without much military training, are "looked after" by their men and look after them—and the "strong", who become adjutants and colonels, those who hunt men into battle, those who inflict punishment "to make an example". Neither of these types die off so quickly as the ordinary regimental officer who keeps his distance from the rank and file yet has neither vitality nor the strength to master them. Men will submit to being driven by a real martinet who has the qualities of his caste when the petty pretender-martinet gets shot in the back during battle. This sifting of officers makes mutiny possible because it makes a gap between sections of the officer class, and their resistance to demands of the soldiers is thereby

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weakened. But in this process the war only sharpens a clash always ready to develop within any ruling class, between those who want to be "kind" to the subject class and those who want to use strong measures.

Usually the grievances of which mutineers complain are well justified. Shackles and the arena for the Roman gladiator; famine rent for the Buckinghamshire yeoman; flogging and scurvy and weevils for the quota-man and the pressed man who won the victories of Aboukir and Trafalgar; loss of country and religion for the sepoy; the unendurable torments of 1917 when the Great War seemed endless—the pressure of these things was surely great enough, on ordinary human material, for us to expect an outbreak of revolt. But men can endure very much; the history of mankind has much starvation and brutality in it, and passive endurance of appalling wrongs, through century after century. . . . Why did revolt, mutiny, occur when it did? What were the winds that blew into flame the smouldering resentment of armies and navies? Those who think of war, and the existence of armies and navies, as mainly a matter of the individual leader's skill, the craft of generalship, naturally believe that mutiny occurs when that skill is lacking. "The mutinies of 1917", writes Liddell Hart,¹ "show that the incapacities of generals and their waste of human life are the most potent factors in disturbing the spirit of discipline."

¹ B. H. Liddell Hart, *Reputations*, London, 1928, p. 45.

But this formula, however well it may fit 1917, is useless in other years. There was no incapacity about Cromwell and not much about the British leadership of native troops in India; Captain Bligh of the *Bounty* was more than competent; at Folkestone and Calais and Invergordon there was no question raised of capacity or incapacity of generals or admirals. It is clear that some other formula must be found to explain why armies and navies, that have suffered unendurable conditions of life so often, only on rare occasions have mutinied.

Surely it is not only the conditions that count, but the class position of the men who make up the armies and navies, and their hopes or disappointment as members of the class to which they belong. Cromwell's army had hopes raised by its victories, by the conquest of the king, and disappointment that these victories did not lead to the victory of the class it represented, the people of the little farms. The quota-men of 1797 came from a class or a section of a class that hoped to share in the expanding wealth and power of England, riches of commerce and prize money and the gold flowing in from the new-conquered India. One of these classes failed and faded out of English history, to give way to the tenant farmer and farm labourer and the pathetic thousands who sweat on waste "allotments"; the other class the city poor of 1797, grew through the Industrial revolution and secured by its trade unions a share, though relatively not a large share, of the

new wealth flooding England. That is why, surely, the Levellers' War was a failure, but Spithead and the Nore—in spite of the apparent ill-success of the latter—succeeded in wringing great improvements from the immovable Admiralty.

In 1917 the mutinies of French soldiers and Russian soldiers and German sailors were certainly as Liddell Hart sees, due largely to incapacity of commanders. But this incapacity was not a personal one; it was the incapacity of the ruling classes in these countries made manifest in war. The rulers could not win peace; "we'll make peace ourselves," said the ruled.

It is part of the technique of modern war to raise hopes among the armies and the civilian working class; these hopes turn to disappointment as the years pass with only new tortures. Whether the disappointment is due to the failure to win battles or not, it is there. Whether it will boil over into mutiny, and whether that mutiny will develop into revolution, depends on the strength of the rulers and the ruled, not on the capacity of generals. Otherwise those who suffered under French and Haig would have mutinied before Passchendaele or during that battle.

Useful evidence on the relation between mutiny and class struggle comes from America. In all the military history of the United States of America there have been no mutinies of importance. Those who try to find a psychological explanation of

mutinies may claim that this is due to a peculiarity of the American temperament. But if they want to put forward this argument they must also claim that Americans are particularly disciplined and obedient to authority, and that "mob feelings" or "collective neuroses" cannot be developed easily among groups of Americans. This would be ludicrous; American troops have always been turbulent, democratic, and unruly; American crowds are very quick to feel and act in unison. During the American civil war there were serious "draft riots" in New York—riots against conscription; there were also some cases of small bodies of troops refusing to obey incompetent commanders. But apart from these cases of no social importance the "crime sheets" of the U.S. army and navy are almost clean; and considering the size of the American merchant marine the number of mutinies recorded is very small. A clear reason for this lies in the class history of the United States.

In the ruling class of America there are no remnants of feudalism, no Lords or Junker landlords representing the far past. And while classes exist and have struggled and do struggle sharply in America, until five or six years ago this struggle was always within the framework of expanding and strengthening capitalism, of greatly increased wealth from which it was easy for the ruling class (unhampered by any great differences of economic origin and outlook within its own ranks) to grant suitable and sufficient concessions to the ruled. Until the great

crisis through which we are still living there was always open to American capital the path of compromise, higher wages, better conditions; in the mines and the cotton fields and the lumber forests class struggles of great ferocity could blaze up without disturbing the main agreement of the classes—an agreement in which the working classes were duped and deluded; but the agreement existed. In the American merchant marine pay and conditions were usually, during the last quarter of last century and the first quarter of this, far better than those in competing ships; the navy and army were also well paid, as compared with European forces; the immense strength and wealth of American capitalism explains why there have been no considerable mutinies. This explanation in terms of class power fits the facts better than any explanation in terms of national psychology.

An explanation in terms of the class struggle applies also to navies in general, and the problem of why these forces so often take the lead in revolt, as in the Russian insurrections of 1905 and 1917, the German of 1918, the breakdown of Austria (begun by mutinies at Cattarro in 1917 and 1918), the Portuguese revolution of October 1910 (which cost King Manoel his throne), the Brazilian struggles of 1910 and 1911, the French revolt in the Black Sea in 1919, and our own Invergordon. Several writers, of whom we may mention two, have noted this tendency among navies.

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Hilaire Belloc has suggested that "revolutions often begin with sailors because it is more difficult to prevent them combining, living as they do at close quarters and in small units and their technical skill being indispensable to those who command them".¹ M. Charles Vidil has tried to explain "why the sailors seem to have this unhappy distinction of being easily agitated by revolts within their ranks, or at least of being amongst the first sections to be affected when there is an uprising on a national scale".² His explanation is briefly that mutiny is a product of mob psychology, of nervous tension and "collective neurosis". He writes:

Discipline on board is not particularly difficult to maintain. But a ship forms a sort of closed container within which the crew leads an existence turned in upon itself, favouring the disturbance of minds, the spreading of false rumours the growth of group suggestion. During the hours off duty the same conversations can be taken up by the same groups, who meet always in their gun-deck or their fore-castle, and the many recesses on board ship make it easy for secret discussions to go on. . . .

M. Vidil compares this relative stability of the groups on board ship with the continual shifting of personnel within an army in the field.

These two writers point to factors of importance in the processes that make navies mutinous or revolutionary, but a wider view is needed if we are

¹ Hilaire Belloc, *Cromwell*, p. 256.

² Charles Vidil, *Les Mutineries de la Marine Allemande*, p. 52.

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to see these processes as a whole. Seamen built the capitalist world; it is natural they should also destroy it. The whole of the material structure of modern life is bound up with sea trade: the paper on which this page is printed was shipped as timber or as wood-pulp from Vancouver or from Helsingfors; the sulphur that helped to whiten it came from Sicily or Louisiana; the ink printed on it probably contains resins from the South Seas and indigo from Germany. We have grown so used to these things that we forget the ships that bring them to us, and the men in those ships. And we forget also, when we look back at the Renaissance that destroyed the feudal order in Europe, the Reformation, the growth of Elizabethan England towards empire, the development of cities, the first factories, the struggles of traders and capitalists to control Europe and the world—we forget that at the foundation of these past events and of to-day's capitalism are the first ocean-going ships and the men who sailed them, men commanded by Columbus and Drake, by Magellan and John Smith. By one of the normal ironies of history these human instruments, ships, have now grown and changed and the men manning them have grown and changed in constant interaction with the new world they were building, until they have become in more ways than one dangers, threats, to the capitalist order rooted in them.¹ The ships have

¹ Dangers, for example, as the most costly and most envied armaments in these armament races that lead to war; the develop-

changed into vast and intricate machines; the seamen have become a leading section of the industrial working class, the most revolutionary force in modern society. That is, in widest outline, the reason why navies have taken the lead in modern mutinies.

A battleship is not only a machine-made structure, it is itself a mass of steam driven or electrically driven gadgets among which the average sailor works not only with his muscles but with his skill as an engineer. Turrets are swung, guns aimed and loaded, boats and anchors raised or lowered, by men controlling valves and switches. It is natural that these men should be drawn from or should become assimilated to the factory workers of the steel and engineering trades: natural that the ideas of trade union organization, strike action, socialism that have grown up in the engineering factories should also penetrate the navies. And since these ideas include to some extent the idea of class differentiation and class struggle, it is natural that the antagonism between sailor and officer should usually be sharper than any similar antagonism in the armies.

This antagonism is sharpened by the fact that officers and men, in the navy, live almost on top of each other: their different conditions are in bold and continual contrast. On very small ships, when the officers are good, this close contact is an excellent ment of dreadnoughts, and of the great combines that built dreadnoughts on each side of the North Sea was one of the forces making the Great War, and that war shook the social system that produced it.

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thing for discipline; officers show their quality in work and establish human relationships with men. But on big ships, whether the officers are good, bad or indifferent, they live in an icy separation from the men who are physically so close to them. And it is an essential part of the class organization of all large navies that the officer should do as little work as possible; he should only direct the doing of work. Battleships are laced with innumerable voice-pipes and telephones, by which officers direct all operations. Vast vessels, travelling at thirty knots, are even steered by word of mouth, the officer of the watch, commander or navigator giving instructions verbally to the helmsman (which may be the reason why these ships run aground or collide occasionally in an undignified fashion). All this makes it difficult for the crew to know or respect their officers and the latter have little moral influence to oppose to mutiny.

Our comparison of various mutinies, and the special cases of America and of the navies, all show that mutiny is a class phenomenon. It follows that if it is desired to make mutiny impossible, to produce a force that will endure the utmost torment, up to complete extinction, without failure of discipline, without lowering of morale, this force must have no class distinctions or antagonisms within its ranks, must be formed of one class or of two closely allied and interwoven classes. The armies and navies of America have in the past been proof against mutiny

because the class antagonisms within their structures were deeply buried under the wealth of progressive American democracy; the forces of the Union of Soviet Republics seem likely to be in the future the only bodies that cannot be expected to mutiny.

But for most countries, at present, this way of preventing mutinies is not possible; for these countries the only way of avoiding mutinies is not to go to war, and not to risk, even in peace time, exhibiting too openly the social gap between officers and men. It would also be wise for the leaders of these armies to sort out for their troops the most stupid, most ignorant and most backward of their populations; such men would handle the intricate machinery of modern war very badly, but they would not think enough to mutiny. And that is perhaps more important than is generally recognized.

If these ideas cannot be followed (and they are not very likely to be) then mutinies will happen. How can they be mastered and suppressed? M. Charles Vidil answers this question by quoting "the admirable method employed by General Pétain to renew in the army morale enfeebled just at the moment when—by a strange coincidence—the German navy was about to undergo disorders".

Pétain's method is described as follows:

In the first place there was the organization of severe repression . . . the General was able to get accepted the exceptional measures needed. On June 8th a decree

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abolished the right of appeal for certain classes of men condemned. It was not a question of striking many men, but of striking hard; and in order that punishment should inspire fear it was necessary for the repression to follow swiftly on the crime. A few days later the General was authorized not to submit certain cases to the President of the Republic but to proceed at once to execution. A month later Pétain himself renounced these exceptional measures, which had produced sufficient effect.

Next there was a systematic sifting out of the troops of the line, purging them of all undesirables who found a peculiar attraction in disorder.

At the same time, slow work but indispensable, the command turned to the ending of all causes of uneasiness, to the bettering as far as was possible of the soldier's conditions. Food was the object of particular attention . . . work on shelters for bad weather, and clothing was revised. Leave was increased. . . .

On the other hand it was indispensable to arrest the flood of pamphlets, papers and leaflets which had been bringing even into the trenches the most deplorable reading matter. . . . But in Pétain's method, Pétain himself occupied first place, for far from entrenching himself in an ivory tower the general went all along the front and listened himself to the voice of the front line soldier. . . .

These methods, in this case, succeeded. Whether they form a "method" that can be applied universally can well be left to the reader to decide. It would not have been easy in March 1917 in Russia to shut the troops off from "deplorable reading matter" or to shoot a few out of hand, without appeal, to in-

spire fear. It might have ended, if Pétain's "severe repression" had been applied, in the Black Sea in 1919, in vessels "going over" to the revolution. On other occasions also the method was clearly inapplicable: Cromwell (whose one execution of a mutineer roused against him the Levellers' War), the admirals at Spithead in 1797 and those at Kiel in 1918, could not safely have used Pétain's method. There is no "method" that can be guaranteed to work.

It is of course possible that in future years the ruling classes of Europe will be more concerned with the question of how to carry out successful mutiny than with the question of how to suppress mutinies of the rank and file. When governments of the subject classes or governments responsive to their pressure come into power, there is always the choice before the old ruling classes—to submit, and see their power of exploitation destroyed, or to use their class grip over the fighting forces in a political mutiny. Such a mutiny, growing into civil war desperate in intensity, is in progress in Spain as this is being written. Its strength derives from foreign support in arms and money, the use of black troops from Africa and the Foreign Legion, and from the backing of wealthy men and of a Church wealthier than it is Christian. Foreign aeroplanes have given it weeks of life, and increased foreign support may give it months, but it is hard to believe that such a mutiny of the officers can for long impose itself on a living and growing people.

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Those who condemn this book, however, as likely to weaken discipline or likely to encourage the development of events similar to those it describes, should be a little careful not to be too ridiculous. If a few weeks ago they were supporting, or advocating benevolent neutrality towards the mutiny of Generals Franco and Mola in Spain—if also they are the sort of people who in a few years might well support a mutiny of British admirals and generals against a government that favours the “lower classes”—it would be better for them to remain silent rather than to attack this book. Or else it would be better for them to say openly: “We believe in discipline—in the interests of property and profits. We believe in mutiny or murder—if in the interests of property and profits. But the discipline of rank-and-file mutineers, trying to end a war, we execrate; we fear and hate any mutiny that wins more liberty or more democracy for those who form the bulk of the armed forces.” If they say this we shall know where we are.

This mutiny in Spain is unlike most of those described in these pages, and particularly unlike in one respect; it increases the danger of international war. Most of the mutinies we have described in modern times had peace as their aim and in some cases peace as their outcome. But if any of the rulers of Europe chooses to blow into the flame, this spark, or any of the thickening cloud of sparks that are scorching the world, if any ruler begins the next

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world war, he also with the same breath will begin the development of mutiny, real mutiny, the refusal of the man with the machine-gun to obey any longer the owner of the machines.